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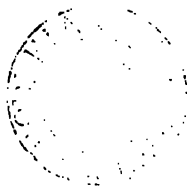
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INGRAM PLACE.

A NOVEL.

BY



A CAPE COLONIST.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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INGRAM PLACE.



CHAPTER I.

NUMBER THIRTEEN.

As Kate, after parting from Miss Joice, turned to enter the ward she attended to, a man wrapped in cloaks that shrouded him from head to foot was carried in, while all that remained of Jack Mills was taken out. The new comer was laid on the vacant bed, and Kate instantly commenced preparations for alleviating his suffering.

‘Poor fellow! he went just in time,’ said lively Mrs. Love, apostrophising the obliging Jack Mills. ‘The bed’s just wanted, and I don’t know what we should have done without; eh, my dear? Well, I’ll go on now you’re here. I leave Number Thirteen in good hands.’

He looked almost dead as he lay there. Great yellow patches, that would soon resolve into one, disfigured a face that but yesterday had been fair and comely. Heavy eyes, burning with fever, seemed to light up the countenance of blithe, handsome Charlie Devereux. Blithe? Handsome? Why there was nothing left of his beauty save the thick clustering curls, damp and dank with the fever dew.

How had he come there? The most popular man about

town, the idol of women, the good fellow of men, the king of *bonhomie*, left to die in this loathsome lazar house, uncared for, untended, except by a stranger ?

The doctor passed hastily round and prescribed for him. His spare half hour, if ever anything but a pious fiction, was gone, and he gave his directions hurriedly.

‘ His head must be shaved, but I don’t see anyone to do it. Mrs. Morton and the rest of them have their hands full. I’ll have a look at those poor creatures, and do it myself.’

He was longer away than he expected. When he returned the sufferer was shorn of his clustering curls.

‘ Who did it ? ’

‘ Me, sir. He was so hot, I didn’t like to wait, though I was sorry for the poor curls,’ and she lifted one of them regretfully.

‘ Very well done, little girl. Mrs. Morton will be round directly ; but whoever is here, you must see to the medicines,’ he said, as he passed on, for Kate’s anxious care and quick memory guarded against mistakes. She nodded her recognition of the weighty trust, and lingered by the new sufferer, vainly endeavouring to cool his parched lips.

By-and-by the fever deepened and showed itself plainly. The heavy eyes began to roll and burn more fiercely, the discoloured hands were tossed wildly about, to lethargic stupor succeeded delirious ravings. At times he would call wildly on some boon companion to help him out of this horrible fire ; now he was arranging a bouquet for dear little Flossy, until the flowers turned to burning coals in his hands. Oh, how strong life was in him ! how he struggled and fought to get away from the fever that

consumed him ! how he tossed and fumed to escape from it, in vain ! how he called frantically on his friends, and there were none to hear !

‘We must change the medicines,’ said Dr. Dalzell as he came round at nightfall ; ‘and we must change the nurse too ; you are too useful to be lost.’

He was shocked to see her look so pale and thin.

‘Couldn’t manage it,’ she said, with quiet decision. ‘They’ve all got their hands full. Tell me all about the medicine.’

What could he do but tell her ? Though he felt she was killing herself, there was no help for it, no time to argue either, and some lives, at least, must hang upon the proper administering of the doses. He told her what to do for each, and took a last pitiful look at Number Thirteen. There had been many number thirteens, the one before had been swearing Jack Mills ; but it was Charlie Devereux now.

‘Poor fellow,’ muttered the stern doctor ; ‘it’s a lonely death enough for him to die.’

‘Is there no hope, sir ?’

‘Not much, little nurse. He’s not dead yet, that’s all I can say for him.’

‘Do you think maybe he has a father or mother ?’

‘Just as likely as not.’

‘How they will miss him !’

‘What can we do ? Don’t know even his name, nothing but C. D. on his linen ; not even a card-case, or a pocketbook. Of course if we sent for the cabman that brought him here, we might find out ; that’s to say if the cabman is yet alive, and supposing we could get him. But

there isn't a soul has time. I see you and that other little imp dying before my eyes, and I haven't time to prevent you.'

He was gone, and Kate was alone with her patients. Number Thirteen was tolerably quiet to-night, but from the other twenty-four beds came ravings and groans, interspersed with the hideous laughter of delirium. A lamp burnt at each end of the ward, and there were tables on which were crowded phials and glasses. On each phial was the number of a bed, on every table a basin of water.

Up and down the apartment glided the pale, noiseless girl, never resting, never passing a single pallet without striving to lessen the misery of the living corpse upon it. By the time she was round once it was time to go again; and so it went on, with little interruption, till as the clock struck twelve she stood beside Number Thirteen.

'What a noble, handsome face it must have been,' she whispered to herself, as she gazed at the broad brow, the finely arched eyebrows, the sweetly curved mouth that looked so boyish now at rest. The livid spots had partially disappeared, the green and yellow had given place to a deathlike hue, the distorted features were settling down into something of their natural beauty, but the girl never guessed that it was the young officer whose name had so often sounded in her ears at Ingram.

'Was it the change before death?' she mused. Had he a mother to miss him every hour of her life? had he a father to weep secret tears for him? had he a sister, perhaps a wife, or one loved as well, to live in widowhood for him? He was a gentleman; everything from his clothes to his white hands told that; he was handsome; he was of a brave noble disposition, she surmised, for in all his mad, feverish

ravings, he was always generous and free; rollicking Charlie Devereux still.

‘He cannot be alone in the world,’ she continued; ‘it is impossible that he should not be loved. How they will mourn him, how they will watch and wait for him, how they will wonder that he does not come! how slow they will be to believe that he died in a crowded cholera ward, that his bones lie mouldering, without a stone to mark their resting place, beside paupers and criminals who never had anyone to love them, who left no one to wonder, and wait, and weep!’ She pictured to herself his mother, from whom perhaps he had inherited that finely curved mouth, those long eyelashes; the father, with the same grand forehead; the sister, fair, graceful, highbred, devoted as a sister might be to such a brother; the wife or betrothed, who would never see his handsome face again, who would never know who put the gravecloth on it, or whether a kind hand had wiped away the dews of death, or he had been left to die like a dog. She must be beautiful, this woman, about to suffer so great a loss. That poor cholera-stricken patient lying there had been able to choose among the very best. She must be true and generous-minded too, or he would not have chosen her; and yet this beautiful, good woman must suffer so terribly. Her heart was filled with a great tide of love and pity as the life-like pictures passed before her with startling vividness ‘Why should such things be?’ she asked herself wonderingly. She looked round the ward at the living corpses, some of them silent, some horribly talkative, and she wondered if they too had some to miss them so much. Twenty-five homes to be made desolate. The flood of pity welled up more and more, till it submerged every other

feeling, every desire but the one, to try and take something, however little, from this great aggregate of suffering. She had learnt to pray by their bedsides, she had learnt to offer up vague but heartfelt petitions to Him whom she had sought blindly for so long. Kneeling now in that cholera ward she prayed that this stranger, so young, so handsome, so noble, who must be so much loved, might be spared, and that her poor, worthless life might be the substitute for his.

Poor child! Her notions of that Divine incarnation of beneficence were so vague, so dim, that she did not presume to ask a boon without offering an equivalent, nor did she dare to ask more than that one life. She had yet to learn of that illimitable bounty, of which we cannot ask too much. Seeking then in the darkness that was breaking, she groped her way to what little light she saw, and offered up her dreary life for that of the handsome stranger.

She took no credit to herself. She acknowledged, in all humility, that her life must be of incomparably less value than his.

Rising languidly she resumed her rounds, whispering comforting words, even to ears that heard not, in the faint hope that they might, and wondering with a quiet rapture would her prayer be answered. It seemed so good a thing for her to die. Sin and wretchedness, struggles for honesty, and greater wretchedness: that was the summary of her life. Should she live to leave the hospital, the old terrible struggle must begin again; she might fail and yield, the terror of her life might come upon her, Balfe might hunt her down. Better die than be brought to bay, better die than return to sin. All in the dark, but groping for the light.

Three nights, and she had not slept. Never had the sufferers found her more patient or more kind than to-night, though unconsciously her step grew heavier and slower.

One o'clock struck as she stood beside Number Thirteen, waiting to steady her hand to pour in the drops of the powerful medicine which was to save or to kill. One drop too much, and he would sleep for ever, one drop too little, and the ineffectual potion would not induce the sleep that alone could save, would, in fact, only give him a stimulus to wear his life out.

She measured it correctly, and essayed to lift the heavy head, but the blood flowed sluggishly in her veins, and it was with difficulty she administered the draught. The burning eyes looked wildly into hers for a few moments, then closed heavily, as with a struggle. Would they ever open?

Drowsily she raised herself, and tottered from bed to bed, wondering languidly why she should feel so tired when she had made up her mind not to be tired, why she did not make up her mind to shake off the feeling now, why she did not even feel a desire to do so, why Mrs. Morton did not come, why the doctor had not passed through again as usual, when he would come, whether she would still be so lazy, and not even fight against it. All this passed through her mind in a sleepy, dreamy sort of fashion. Suddenly the truth flashed across her mind—the cholera had come to her, her prayer had been heard.

The conviction came like a flash of lightning, breaking momentarily through the torpor, but it brought no pang with it. Life had been very bitter, death would be very sweet, and this man, who must be loved, would perhaps recover.

She came slowly across, and looked at Number Thirteen. Sleeping, almost calmly, still with the death hue, but sleeping. A smile stole over her face as she went round to pay her farewell visits. She moved so slowly now, her hands and feet had become so heavy a load, that it took her double the usual time to give each one the right medicine, or moisten the dying lips. Number Twelve held her hand while he breathed his last, and morn was breaking as she stood beside Number Thirteen. With death surging in her ears, and deafening her with weird noises and oppressing sensations, it seemed strange she should have selected this one from the others as the subject of her prayer. Then dawned on her something of illimitable love, and she marvelled she had not asked for all.

He moved uneasily just as, unable to stand, she had sunk on her knees beside the bed. She saw the parched lips, the involuntary gesture, and slowly dragging her heavy limbs to the nearest table for a cordial, she returned to moisten his lips. Her strength is ebbing away fast, her eyes are dim, the noises grow louder, but with a supreme effort she accomplishes her object. The bottle drops from her feeble grasp, Number Thirteen turns his head peacefully, outward objects recede, and all is stillness with nurse and patient.

Stay—not all peace and stillness. Were not those the eyes of her shadow looking into hers? Was not that the face that had dogged her in town and country, in pestiferous lanes, and under the free grand canopy of Heaven? Had they hunted her down at last? Was it Balfé's spy, or the police detective? A convulsive desire to flee passed in a moment, then she triumphed. Yes, she was hunted down, but it was too late, and without fear she watched the sharp

ferret eyes, the keen face bristling all over with inquisitiveness, approach nearer, then recoil with an indescribable fear.

'I thought to be in at two, little nurse,' whispered the gruff old doctor, 'but we had sixteen arrivals since eleven, and Mrs. Morton nine.'

She withdrew her gaze from the face that had fascinated her, and looked up with a faint smile, livid and distorted, in the pale cold light that came shivering in at the unshuttered casements.

'Poor things!' she murmured pitifully. 'God pity them all!'

'Gracious Heaven!' he groaned, lifting her up.

A man stepped out of the shadow as the nurse ushered in a lady. The doctor stared at them in stupefied astonishment.

'Well?' said the lady eagerly, 'are we successful at last?'

'Yes,' the man said, in an awestruck tone; 'we've hunted her down as I told you we would, but it's too late.'

'Too late?' she repeated, looking down at the discoloured face of the little nurse. Then she clasped her hands with a cry of remorseful regret: 'ah, yes, too late! too late!'

They did not see the door open again, they did not notice a tiny figure with a haggard face and great sad dark eyes, till a bitter cry rang through the hospital.

'Kate, oh, Kate! have they killed you after all?'

There was no response from the now unconscious sufferer, and Jenny Joy turned on the two strangers.

'Oh, you've hunted her down at last, have you?' she said, between her set teeth. 'And she thought it was Balfe, or the police; she never dreamt it was the lady

that pretended kindness that run her through the world like a deer before the hounds. But I know you, Miss Ingram. Oh, yes, I know you now, and I know why you won't let her alone. Well, well, you've got her now, and it's too late.'

'Yes, yes, I fear it is too late,' said the lady sadly. 'You are her friend? Well, so am I.'

CHAPTER II.

FIGHTING HER WAY.

'AND she is your daughter, is she?' queried Dr. Dalzell, gloomily of the gloomy-looking visitor.

'Ay,' said the other, with equal gloom.

'You deserve a daughter, you do,' hissed the doctor bitterly. 'You let her kill herself, and then you come and look at her. I wouldn't wonder if you had a good cry over her grave. It couldn't do any harm, once she's gone, and it would be the proper thing, all of a piece.'

The tramp remained moodily silent, looking down at the moaning sufferer, listening to her strange prayer, which she repeated over and over.

'Aren't you afraid of catching it?' said Dr. Dalzell suddenly and savagely. 'We're short of nurses just now, and you'd fare but badly, I'm thinking.'

'It's a sin agen Heaven for you to stand there,' burst forth Jenny, from the other side of the bed. 'If you hadn't made her life miserable, she wouldn't have walked straight into her grave. An' to say they won't hang you.'

'I never ill-treated her,' he said in a restrained tone.

'Poor father!' murmured the sick girl plaintively.

'You gave her enough to eat; yes, you did. You didn't open her head with a poker; no, you didn't, but you done worse than that. You tried to make her a thief, you wanted to send her to Hell, and so Heaven is taking her in spite of you.'

A startled look came into the man's eyes, as sobs choked her speech. Had not that been his aim? And was Providence taking the matter out of his hands? Was it so indeed, and was the rich man's treasure so carefully guarded? It was a bitter thought; it choked back all the pity that had been surging up so bravely, that had well-nigh drowned his fierce revenge, until the plaintive voice broke forth again.

'Poor father, poor father, Jenny. I hope he won't miss me.'

All the pity surged up again. She was not the rich man's daughter, she was not the aristocrat's heiress, shielded from the breath of evil, she was the weak, simple girl whose wistful eyes had appealed to him from childhood. She was the child who for eleven years had made his thieves' den somewhat of a home, the little waif whose very helplessness had made him involuntarily her protector, whose gentle, uncomplaining spirit had at times awed him into the recognition of a higher, grander power than man's scheming, or Satan's daring, a power above and beyond rules and regulations, a power that was not to be limited by human calculations, a power independent of circumstance or material agent, a power, in short, capable of instilling a love of goodness and truth into a little outcast, untaught of man.

He stood and listened to her raving, and knew that he listened to no new revelation. All that the girl felt now, she had felt in her home in the Thieves' Latin; the only difference was she had been unable to express it then, and even now great thoughts struggled forth in imperfect words. No, he listened to nothing new when he heard her pitiful thoughts of a hard father, he only heard what the mute face had told him long ago. Nothing new, when her thoughts rambled away to the times she had passed at Ingram Place.

'Poor old man,' she said. 'But I could not comfort him. His grey hairs were for his daughter, and I could not comfort him.'

With indescribable pathos she repeated the last words. This idea of the mournful, grey-haired man seeking comfort which she was unable to give was the one to which she most frequently recurred; it seemed to haunt her, to wind itself into every shape of her delirious fancies. Sometimes she would tell him she would pray to die, that his daughter might be restored to him, noble and good, not a poor outcast like her. But it was nothing new; that wondrous pity had been always there, that sublime longing to lessen the sorrows of others had been nourished in the haunts of vice, in the dark places of the earth. Nourished? By whom?

'Jenny.'

It was Balfe who spoke, and she turned at him with the bitterness she could not express in words burning in her eyes.

'It's a promise I've just made.'

'What's the good?' said Jenny Joy, with mournful disdain, 'promises won't bring her back, man, nor performances neither.'

'The life is in her yet, and you must tell her what I say as soon as she's able to listen. Tell her I set her free from duty to me, that I'll leave her alone without fear of me. Tell her to forgive me that I don't do more, but I can't, I can't.'

He touched the fevered hand pitifully, remorsefully, but did not stoop to kiss his daughter. Then he went out, debating within himself a mighty question.

A lady stopped before him in the passage, and the gloomy eyes looked out from their reverie. They knew each other, the lady and the tramp.

'You—you have found her?' she said eagerly.

'Just an hour later than your detective, ma'am. You see it took just that time for my boy to bring me word where Job Ferret was.'

'Ah, I understand. But what are you going to do?'

'Supposing I return the question, Miss Ingram,' he retorted insolently. 'It would be only fair, I think, for it's no ways strange for a father to search for his daughter, but it is a little remarkable that a young lady should spend a great deal of time and money in hunting up a strange girl.'

'You make a mistake,' said the young girl, with the calm dignity that was so new, yet so natural to her, 'it is you who seek the stranger, I sought my cousin.'

He looked piercingly at her, but the assured tone never faltered. All the pride of an Ingram looked at him out of the fair childish face.

'And suppose it was? Where would you be then?'

'What has that to do with it?' she exclaimed, with a superb scorn that startled and puzzled him. 'All I want

from you is that you will for the future let this unhappy child alone.'

'And suppose I refuse?'

'You will think before you do that,' and the clear eyes flashed determination. 'It is true you are a man, and I am but a girl, but I tell you while I have breath that girl shall not remain your victim. I have money on my side, remember, I have money and position, and something else—right.'

'You might have left out the last without in the least damaging your cause. But does that mean that you'd like me to leave her in your clutches, Miss Ingram, Baroness that was to be?'

'Who so fit? I, one of her nearest relations.'

'Exactly so,' he sneered.

'Will you relinquish the hold you have on her?'

'No!'

'Then I shall take her in spite of you.'

'You will? How?'

'I shall set in motion every engine of the law. You are not beyond its power, and my woman's wit will teach me to find your vulnerable part.'

'And what shall I be doing? Will the law have nothing to say to your actions? Or will it be hoodwinked because it is violated by a lady of quality?'

'I have told you already that right is on my side.'

'The right to hide—put out of the world, maybe—the girl who stands in your way.'

'Is that what you think?'

'Eh? I am not blind, ma'am.'

'Well, suppose I satisfy you as to my plans. What then? Will you promise?'

'What need?' he said ironically. 'You have right on your side.'

'Yes; and therefore half of my plan must succeed, but the other half, which depends on avoidance of publicity, may be defeated by your defiance. That is why I seek to secure your co-operation.'

'At least, ma'am, you are frank.'

He was fast losing the brogue, fast relapsing into purity of accent and language, conversing with this young girl.

'Oh, yes, I am frank. Why should I pretend to conciliate you, if I had not an object? At the same time, I am willing to make it worth your while to agree.'

'And I tell you, ma'am, you may spare yourself the trouble. What bribe so dear to me as my vengeance? If that barely suffices to keep me firm to my vow, think you some paltry gift will induce me to forego my cherished plans, play into your hands, consummate the misery of a simple child, not for my purposes, but yours? You do not know me.'

'I acknowledge you are not the person I took you for, but that renders it all the more easy for me to deal with you. Come into this room, and hear my plans, my reasons too, before you refuse to act with me. You will regret it if you do not.'

'Threats are of no more avail than bribes,' he said scornfully. 'What could you do that would affect me?'

'I tell you it will affect you when you know it too late, but not you alone.'

'I will listen, then; it can do no harm.'

They entered the room, and Miss Ingram closed the door as Dr. Dalzell came down the stairs. He was puzzled.

‘And what will you do with her if I were to give her up, Miss Ingram?’

‘My first object would be to educate her properly—give her all the advantages that money could procure for three years at least.’

‘Ay, ay, I understand,’ he sneered. ‘No school like a convent.’

‘I would leave you to select the school.’

‘And then?’ he asked, leaning forward. This clever rogue, who set the police of the city at defiance, who traced his booty as the detective force could never trace him, was set at fault by this young girl of eighteen, whose finesse was truth, whose cleverness was a simple struggle to do right.

‘And then? Why then she would be fit to take her lawful place.’

‘And you tell me to do this? To give Lord Ingram back his daughter, pure, good, accomplished, as though she had never left him—he, who would not have her as she is now, a world too good for him. You are mad to ask me to do this.’

‘You are wrong to say he would not have her. She ran away—with a good motive; but she ran away.’

‘Ran away? But he let her. Maybe he didn’t tell her to go, and maybe he did; but he didn’t keep her, he let her go. I told him I’d take her from him, but he didn’t wait, sure. She couldn’t minister to his pride; she wasn’t another crown of glory to his house; she was only a poor ignorant child, not very clearly guilty, needing all a father’s love and forbearance, and so he let her go.’

‘I tell you ——’

‘Don’t tell me. I tell you she was a disgrace to him,

and he had no pity for her. Do ye think he'd be sorry to hear she was dead to-morrow? Well, he wouldn't; he'd be glad; it would be the proudest minit he's known these twelve years. And d'ye think it's back to him I'm going to give her? D'ye think it's for such as him I'm going to leave myself without a soul in the world to care for me? D'ye think that brute as I am I'd shut my heart to my poor girl, no matter how bad she came back to me? Covered with sin and crime I would take her in; I would be her father if I could only get her back, no matter how. But I can't now or ever; I can't get my girl back; she won't come to me; nobody will bring her or send her; and d'ye think I'll give him another chance? A daughter is nothing to him, and he shall never have one.'

She was a brave girl not to be appalled by that fierce, livid hate, that awful hardening of the vengeful voice that came with the thought of that daughter lost for ever, who could never be got, any way or anyhow.

'But you only think of him; you do not think of her —of the lonely miserable life she has dragged through all these years, of the good she has given for evil, the truth and love she has shown to you for all the wrong you have done her.'

'Yes, yes, I do think of it,' he interrupted fiercely. 'I thought of it long ago; I thought of it an hour ago, when I renounced my vow to ruin the soul of his daughter, when I spoke my promise to let her go her own ways, and get to Heaven if she could.'

'Did you do that?' Miss Ingram exclaimed breathlessly, rising from the chair.

'Yes; but, mark me, ma'am. If she's to be honest it'll be for me, not for Lord Ingram; if she's a good

daughter it'll be to me; if she can save a sinful man it won't be him, though for certain it's hardly like to be me. I'm pretty well gone past such a chance, but it's a chance he'll never have.'

'But do you suppose that my uncle and I will quietly sit down and let you do this? Do you think we will not make any effort to get her?'

'Get her, get her, if I'm fool enough to give you the chance. Get her, I say, a hundred times in the year, and so many times will I whistle her back. D'ye think I don't know my hold on her?'

She felt the truth of what he said. The very struggle of the girl's mind towards goodness would but tighten that hold, would render it impossible for Lord Ingram to establish any claim to her obedience. With strengthened principle would come an increased sense of duty to the parent she recognised; with established notions of honesty would grow an intensified dislike to further what she looked upon as an imposture, adopted by her father for revenge.

'You are very hard,' she said at length, 'on this poor child, who screened you at the expense of her own disgrace. I don't believe she committed that robbery; but if they had transported her, she'd not have betrayed you. You are cruel to her, and so I tell you that if you drive me to extremities I will have you arrested for that crime. I will represent matters so that she will see the sin of perverting the truth, and you will be condemned. Yes, I will do this, even though in my heart I think that great as are your crimes your sufferings are still greater.'

'Your representations would fall on dull ears,' he rejoined, with an expression that was partly admiration,

partly triumph. 'Kate is just at that stage of goodness when she has less horror of a lie in the abstract than of turning informer. I don't mind telling you in confidence that it is only her evidence could convict me, and so I feel quite comfortable. If the rope was round her neck, she wouldn't give them a hint.'

'It is true. It is all true,' Miss Ingram said, with a sort of despairing triumph. 'She is so good, she would die before she would betray you. Have you no pity?'

'What do you want me to do? Send her back to the father that didn't want her? No.'

'Give her to me. I want her. Forget that she is Lord Ingram's daughter.'

'And ——?'

'And I will fit her for the position that meanwhile I will hold in trust for her.'

The worse nature of the man seemed to fall from him like a shell. It would come again—the better man would once more be obscured; it had been stifled too long in darkness to be able to bear the light. But it was something that for a brief space it shone forth; that for a few moments he felt himself a human being within the pale of salvation; that for a little time he forgot his hopeless, irretrievable misery. Oh, yes, it was something, and he owed it to this young girl, who came to him to rid herself of a vast fortune, a grand title—not because they were wearisome to her, not because they were worthless, few could appreciate or were fitted to enjoy them better; but because she could not stoop to deprive a girl, poor, defenceless, and ignorant, of what was hers by right.

He paced the room, and he felt that he would owe this half-hour to this young girl with the soft golden hair

rippling over her fair, honourable brow, with the clear, steadfast eyes, out of which looked a grand soul, who spoke to him as a man capable of comprehending honour. Yes, he would owe her that. Well, he would owe her something else too. But whatever he would do must be done quickly, before the spell—that he knew was only a spell after all, and that might never be renewed—was worn off.

‘I talk to you as I never thought I would talk to anyone again,’ he said, pausing abruptly. ‘You’ve roused more good than I thought was in me, and though it’s only to make me more wretched, still I thank you,’ and for the first time he lifted the tattered cap from the matted locks, that in all their savage untidiness could not quite conceal the grandly massive head. ‘It’s something, sure, to know that I’m not all devil yet. No, no, don’t expect too much. Not all devil, but most part; so I’ll tell you the most I’ll do for you. You come to educate a girl to take your place, that she may not only enjoy what you might have, but enjoy it with honour?’

She bent her head.

‘I could not do otherwise. It is hers, not mine. I should yield it to her in any case, educated or not.’

‘Well, the idea pleases me. If anyone told me an hour ago you’d propose it, I’d have let that man go safe on the loneliest common as either a madman or a natural. You can have the girl on one condition—that you say not a word to Lord Ingram to hint that you got her, or a word to her that I’m nothing but a vagabond to her, that I’ve no right even to the kindly thought she might have for such a father as me.’

‘For how long?’

‘For how long? Till I tell you.’

‘How can I promise what I know I could not do? Give me a time, and I will keep your conditions.’

‘Then when Lord Ingram craves for the love even of the wretched child he welcomed so scurvily, he’ll get back his daughter, and—you’ll lose your inheritance.’

‘Till then he must be a poor lonely old man?’

‘Till then his pride will be enough for him. Will he be as lonely as me, that cry night and day for my outcast, and can’t get her back? When he is, don’t I tell you he’ll be heard?’

Were it in her power to restore this timid, awkward girl, even with a full assurance of being able to keep her, would Lord Ingram thank her? She could not tell whether his pride might not be stronger than his paternal affection; the latter certainly would not be equal to the public disgrace which would be the consequence of going to cross purposes with this gloomy man, who so curtly announced his unalterable determination. She would therefore consent to work and wait.

‘I agree to your proposition,’ she said, fixing her grave young eyes on the robber; ‘I give you my word, and I hold you to yours. I trust you so far.’

‘Done,’ he responded gloomily. ‘I can’t answer for myself. I tell you plainly I don’t trust you.’

‘It is not necessary,’ she said, with a haughty smile. ‘All I require is that you do not thwart my precautions for secrecy.’

‘Well, well, you’ve talked me over, and’—he turned with a suddenness that made her start for the first time, ‘at least I thank you that for a few minutes I forgot I

was a convict, a thief, an outlaw, and fancied myself again a man not utterly incapable of honour or trust.'

He lifted his ragged hat with a strange semblance of courtesy, and went out. Miss Ingram overtook the doctor.

'How is Kate, doctor?'

There was a strange glitter of triumph mingling queerly enough with her anxiety for the answer.

'Much the same.'

'May I see her?'

'If you like to catch it.'

'I am not afraid.'

He did not like that strange confab with that ill-looking tramp, so he did not seek to dissuade her.

Yes, much the same. The same great pity for all running through the sick girl's ravings; the same pathetic prayer. Jenny Joy looked suspiciously at the lady.

'She would have a better chance of recovery if she could be moved,' said Miss Ingram. Jenny looked up fiercely.

'She shan't be moved,' said Dr. Dalzell curtly.

'At least, then, let me help to nurse her.'

'No,' said Jenny; 'not while I'm alive, and least of all you.'

'You distrust me,' said Miss Ingram, looking quietly at Jenny Joy. 'Why?'

Jenny Joy was not easily abashed, but there was something in the grave, quiet look that made her feel sorry for her fierceness.

'I don't know why,' she said, stretching her hands protectingly over Kate as if to shield her from this stranger, whose fair face fascinated her in spite of herself. 'I only know Kate shan't be left in your hands.'

‘I am sorry you will not let me help you. But I have a request to make of you ;’ and she drew near to the elf. Putting her hand on the thin shoulder, and looking down into the dark eyes, she continued :—

‘When she is well, don’t spirit her away again. You gave me a great deal of trouble, but I bear you no ill-will, because you did it from love to her.’

‘And what right have you to dodge her steps, and make her life a misery ?’ was the fierce rejoinder.

‘I had my own reasons.’

‘And I had mine.’

‘I know you had, but you will have them no longer when I tell you that by hiding Kate from me you will greatly injure her.’

‘How ?’

‘You are very exacting, but you are her friend, therefore I will tell you. I will trust you, and you must trust me.’

‘No, I won’t,’ was the impetuous interruption. ‘I don’t want confidences that way. I’m not going to trust farther than I see.’

‘Well, still I will trust you,’ said the lady, with a gentleness that Jenny disliked, because she felt it was conquering her. Still she listened attentively to a few low-spoken words. She made no reply when the lady had finished, she did not speak while Miss Ingram took a last sorrowful look at the restless patient. Only when she was gone, and the doctor had been summoned away, she flung herself passionately beside the bed.

‘And to think, my darling, that they should only come now ! Oh, why didn’t they come a little sooner ?’

CHAPTER III.

WHY THE PEOPLE SHOUTED.

RECOVERING slowly, very slowly, but still recovering. That was the news now from the little room where the doctor had established his head-quarters. That was the news that spread throughout the whole building, through every ward where there was a patient with sense enough to comprehend, among convalescents, who raced about like madmen at the thought that they had not killed their little nurse after all.

Yes, recovering. Getting back the power to wonder, and speculate, and fear, and remember. Almost the first thing that excited her curiosity was what had become of Number Thirteen. He, too, was getting better, they told her, but not yet able to leave the hospital. Miss Ingram, remembering the petition of which he had been the subject, desired to see him, and as he had announced his intention of leaving very soon, the doctor acceded.

‘I sent him into my room,’ he remarked, as he led the way. ‘What brought him into a hospital I can’t conceive.’

‘Charlie!’

‘Flossy!’

They stood looking at each other, utterly unable to account for the meeting. At last Charlie turned laughingly to the doctor.

‘Will there be any danger in my shaking hands?’

‘None, if you don’t dislocate your wrists.’

‘How did you find me, Flossy?’

'I didn't find you at all. We all thought you were at Rome. Didn't you get leave of absence for a tour?'

'Ah! Well, it's all right.'

'But who let you come here?' she demanded indignantly.

'My friends, Floss. But perhaps it's the best thing they could have done for me. Tell me all the news, though, first.'

'Do you know who nursed you?'

'No. Who?'

She checked herself suddenly.

'A young girl, Charlie, not more than fourteen, or perhaps fifteen. She nursed here for three months; ever since the cholera raged, in fact, until just as your disease took a favourable turn, she fell ill herself.'

'Is she not better?'

'Yes. But what do you think of a child like that braving such dangers out of pure pity?'

'Think! I think what every soul in this place thinks—that she is a heroine of the true stamp. Ah! You should hear the people in the ward I have just left speaking of their little nurse.'

She was satisfied with the heartiness of the reply, and again the inexplicable look of triumph shone in her eyes.

'The carriage will be here in half-an-hour, Charlie, and you must let me drive you to Merrion Square.'

'I am first to see my little nurse and her brave companion, for you know there are two of them.'

'Yes, and I know not to which to reward the palm, both are so generous, so true. Oh, Charlie! you don't know how worthless I feel beside them.'

She walked to the window as she spoke, and tapped

the pane reflectively, while Charlie asked whether he could see the little nurse to-day.

‘No, not to-day,’ she said, turning round suddenly. ‘She is not well enough.’

‘You have seen her then?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Why?’ he asked, with a startling idea. She looked at him with a peculiar smile.

‘Why? Is it only given to men to appreciate goodness? Cannot I reverence it, though I have it not? Doctor, I want you to show me the places you promised. Not good-bye, Charlie; I shall see you again.’

She led the doctor out, never stopping till they were at the door of Kate’s room.

‘It is not necessary he should see her, doctor, but you can tell him all her goodness.’

‘But I have promised.’ And Dr. Dalzell was very much puzzled with himself that he was not more angry with this impertinent young lady who presumed to dictate to him.

‘But for my sake, doctor, and hers.’

‘Well——’

‘I know you will see to it. Now I want your assistance at a conference.’

Sitting in a low chair by the window was the invalid. Jenny had just smoothed her cushion and arranged her footstool, all Miss Ingram’s gifts. At the lady’s bidding, the elf remained with her small, thin arms on the back of Kate’s chair, and Dr. Dalzell drew two chairs near to the window. Miss Ingram looked at all three, and she saw Kate was the only one who trusted her. Nothing daunted, she began to speak. As she went on, Dr. Dalzell

leant eagerly forward, and Jenny adopted a less menacing attitude.

‘No, no,’ Kate said feebly. ‘You are all wrong, Miss Ingram.’

‘No, my dear, I am all right, and all I want is that you should trust me.’

What wondrous magic had she employed that the gruff doctor should rise and shake her hand and ask her pardon? that Jenny should pour out the fulness of her confidence to atone for past suspicions? What glamour had she thrown over these simple, unworldly people, to drive away their cautious resolves, their elaborate prudence?

Charlie Devereux did not get the opportunity of seeing the little nurse to thank her. He only caught a glimpse of her next day as she came down the staircase leaning on the doctor’s arm, nodding a last good-bye to the patients who thronged the hall to shower upon her their passionate Irish blessings.

‘Heaven bless them both,’ cried hundreds of voices as the two little nurses stepped into a close cab, ‘and comfort their hearts in every sorrow as they comforted ours.’

Then a wild cheer rang out from the throng of convalescents, a cheer that was echoed wildly in the sick wards by lips that never spoke again even, by men distracted by present pain. Again it rose, and clear and sweet and high was Charlie Devereux’s voice, as he waved his cap with boyish exultation. Again, and yet again, it thrilled the hearts of the listeners, till it was taken up by the quickly collected multitude outside, many of whom had reason to divine the cause of the enthusiastic shouts that now resounded in the open air like a magnificent

chorus, a grand hymn of triumph, before which Dr. Dalzell stood bareheaded.

A lady leaned out of the carriage.

‘Doctor, does Mr. Devereux see this farewell?’

‘See it!’ he exclaimed, trying in vain to speak calmly.

‘He should be blind and deaf not to see and hear it. Fortunately he is neither, so he helps to swell the anthem.’


Then the cab drove slowly away, and Dr. Dalzell returned to his kingdom.

A carriage with blazoned panels and armorial bearings had been stopped with the throng, and could only move forward now. Two gentlemen sat inside, both wonderfully handsome with a grand patrician beauty; both with cold, stern blue eyes, in which lurked a mighty shadow.

‘What is it, Blennerhasset?’ demanded the elder man, as the wild shouts rose and swelled and died and rose again, and filled the air with a mad enthusiasm. Rohan Blennerhasset leant out of the carriage window, and saw over the heads of the crowds a close cab before the hospital, a bareheaded man standing on the lowest step. But he could make nothing of it; and again the hearty cheer resounded, not from within alone, but from the crowd without as well, thrilling him in spite of himself.

‘Why are the people shouting?’ he asked of a man standing almost under the carriage wheels, while even Lord Ingram looked out. The voice of a multitude had stirred his heart as he had not thought it could be stirred.

‘It is their farewell to the little nurses, sir. Sure it’s myself that ought to know. God bless them!’ and he lifted his tattered hat with a reverential courtesy that at times transforms the Irish peasant into one of Nature’s courtiers.



'Who are they? Ladies, I suppose?' For Rohan Blennerhasset could not conceive such demonstrations in honour of less than a Florence Nightingale.

'Ladies! Oh, yes, sir, though not your sort, maybe. It's poor they are in money, but their hearts are rich, sure enough. They wor work-girls, sir, afore they wor nurses for the love of Heaven.'

'Work-girls?'

The scarcely expressed contempt did not escape the quick-witted labourer.

'Sure, sir, it's not grudge them the glory ye would? You see, sir, you grand folks have royal salutes; we have no guns to fire, so this is our royal salute;' and again he joined the cheer and waved his cap till the street looked like a waving forest.

'They were very good, then?' Lord Ingram said.

'Good, sir? Ah! It's not the like of them ye have in all yer grand carriages. That's why we give them the salute straight from our hearts instead of from guns.'

The cab passed slowly. Every woman in the crowd uttered a benediction that like a low, rich melody pervaded the atmosphere. Every man lifted his hat, and involuntarily the two gentlemen did the same. Then the throng dispersed, the road was cleared, and the carriage moved on.

'Ah!' said Lord Ingram, with an accent of despair, 'you see it is possible to be good and poor.'

Rohan Blennerhasset knew to what he alluded, but he knew not how to comfort him.

'Yes,' he said at length, 'it is possible, but it is very hard.'

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT LORD INGRAM WAS TO REMEMBER, AND WHAT MRS.
CHIRRUP WAS TO FORGET.

ROHAN BLENNERHASSET called at Merrion Square the next day, and found only Mrs. Chirrup at home. He could see there was a trouble that was not at home in the kindly eyes, and he wondered was it the trouble that perplexed him.

The servant suddenly threw open the door to admit Miss Ingram. She came in with the rich pink in her cheeks, the dazzling light in her eyes, the brilliancy of triumph clothing her lithe form: splendidly beautiful she looked, though there was not a feature in her face that would bear criticism.

'You look like one who has just won a great victory,' he said almost involuntarily, as, after a distant salutation, he placed a chair for her.

'Well, I have just had a great success,' she said, looking frankly—audaciously, he thought—at him.

Mrs. Chirrup dropped her knitting-pins, and looked at her niece, the trouble deepening before her beauty.

'What do you mean?' she said tremulously.

'Oh, only some private business of my own, godmother,' said the girl, with a gay laugh.

'Good Heavens! How heartless she is,' thought Mr. Blennerhasset.

'Are you going to this grand literary soir  e, Mr. Blennerhasset?'

'No. I don't appreciate those gatherings,' he said coldly.

'I'm shocked at your bad taste. I wouldn't miss it for anything.'

'I thought you had refused, my dear?'

'So I did, godmother, but that was when I was in a bad humour. I am quite a different person now, and I mean to not only go, but to enjoy myself thoroughly, since I can do so now with a good heart.'

There was a jubilant sound in her voice that seemed to fulfil the worst forebodings of the two people who heard her.

'Oh, my dear, my dear, I wish——'

The plaintive tone stirred Miss Ingram, spite of the cynical eyes she felt on her.

'Wish what?' she said very gently, going over to her godmother.

'I don't know, my dear, I don't know. I think it is that you would tell me why you are so gay to-day.'

'Because I am so happy, godmother.'

'Happy, child?'

'Yes, godmother; happy as one is when one's labours are crowned with success, when one's wishes are gratified to the full, when, after a long period of anxiety and doubt, one is at last filled with a proud security that nothing can shake.'

Mrs. Chirrup beat her head under the awful triumph that was such humiliation to her, and murmured words that her niece did not hear.

'Heaven forgive me for my share of it,' she said.

'There's Charlie,' said Miss Ingram, as a carriage drove to the door, and she rushed from the room with as

buoyant a step as though she were not the trouble of two good, honourable hearts.

‘Charlie, you needn’t say anything about seeing me at the hospital.’

‘All right, Floss;’ and in another instant Mrs. Chirrup had almost forgotten her own troubles in listening to Charlie’s comical account of his adventures.

‘In the hospital?’ was repeated in every tone of the gamut. Even Rohan Blennerhasset, who was astonished at nothing, was a little startled.

‘How was it you never sent us word?’

‘What was the good? I didn’t know anything about it till I was getting well.’

‘What hospital were you in?’ asked Mr. Blennerhasset.

‘St. Anne’s.’

‘And when did you leave?’

‘Yesterday, late.’

‘Yesterday,’ said Mrs. Chirrup, in a tone of reproach.

‘It was really late, auntie,’ he said, in the old coaxing way, ‘and I was awfully hungry, you know. Now, don’t look shocked, you ethereal people; not altogether basely hungry, but craving for a decent dinner with clean napkins and decanters, and a black-coated waiter—a dinner that wouldn’t be devoured by a hundred hungry eyes before I touched it. Besides, I didn’t care to come here straight from the hospital.’

‘To be sure, my dear,’ said Mrs. Chirrup, with a sudden touch of prudence. ‘You had to change your things. You burnt the ones you wore, I hope?’

‘Indeed, I did nothing so extravagant.’

‘But you must, my dear. On no account forget it. I’ll come to your room, and fumigate them myself.’

Charlie stood up and made a low bow.

'Your Majesty will be most welcome to my poor apartments.'

'If you only left last night, you know something of the cheering and shouting,' Mr. Blennerhasset remarked.

'I should rather think I do. I never thought a sick man could have such lungs as I had yesterday; because you know, auntie,' and he turned pathetically to Mrs. Chirrup, 'you know I'm an invalid yet, and want a great deal of petting.'

'You don't mean to say you cheered?' said Blennerhasset.

'Indeed I did most lustily.'

'What for?'

'What for? Why, man, for my life, and when I think of it I could do it again;' and he flung his hat to the ceiling, in defiance of the safety of the precious ornaments on the table.

'Did they nurse you?'

'They did just. The one that nursed me through the worst of it I only saw yesterday, but when I was getting sensible I was looked after by a little witch who nursed her friend and me, and goodness knows how many more. I'll never forget her face. Heaven bless them both, wherever they're gone to.'

'Heaven bless them,' repeated Mrs. Chirrup solemnly. 'So they nursed you, my dear boy?'

'Yes, auntie, and nursed me well, or I shouldn't be quite so saucily inclined to-day.'

'But who were they? Is it true they were poor girls?' demanded Blennerhasset.

'Quite true, I believe.'

‘And what an ovation they received.’

‘What does it matter who they were,’ interposed Miss Ingram, ‘since you have been told what they were?——’

She stopped, as she perceived Lord Ingram. There was a something in the mournful dignity of this man, so proud in spite of the disgrace that had turned his grey hairs to white, that checked freedom of speech.

‘I hope I have not interrupted you, Miss Ingram.’

‘We were speaking of two poor girls, uncle,’ she said, with a strange, gentle tenderness, ‘who without money, home, friends, education, without a single advantageous circumstance, have made themselves a name and a fame, a home in the hearts of a multitude.’

He bent his head as she paused to show he heard.

‘Was it not a brave thing to do, uncle?’ she went on, laying her hand caressingly on the arm of his chair. ‘To brave this terrible cholera, to live for three months in its very mouth, not for money, not for praise, for pure pity? Would you not feel proud if anyone belonging to you were capable of such deeds? Even though they were poor and ignorant and untaught, would you not feel it an honour to claim them? Would you not feel proud of me if I soared high, high above those who were my superiors in education, in fortune, in all life’s wonderful blessings?’

He looked up suddenly.

‘You are a good girl, Beatrice, a good girl; better than I ever thought, than I had ever any right to expect,’ he said, with a sincerity that shocked Mrs. Chirrup and disgusted Blennerhasset.

‘Gracious Heavens, so young, and such a hypocrite! She has wound this poor man round her finger.’

‘You should have seen the farewell given to those poor

children yesterday. The air was rent with shouts; hundreds assembled to take a last look at the little nurses. But Charlie can tell you all about it better than I can.'

'I did see something of it;' and Lord Ingram passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

'Ah! And it was such a farewell as two princesses might have had; no, but two queens enthroned in the hearts of those people for whom they had served and suffered. It was something to be remembered, was it not?'

Her eyes flashed, the colour deepened, as she spoke rapidly, excitedly.

'Royalty seldom gets such a farewell as that,' said Charlie; 'and yet it was not half good enough.'

'You are enthusiastic too?'

'Yes, my lord; I have reason to be. I shall never speak of those two young girls without lifting my hat.'

'You will remember this, uncle,' Miss Ingram said eagerly; 'you will remember this reverence, you will remember this testimony to goodness, you will remember that borne yesterday by hundreds of witnesses. Think of it day and night; think of it, and let the thought of it be as a ray of the light of Heaven.'

'I know you would comfort me,' Lord Ingram said in a low voice, 'but you cannot.'

'Only think of it, uncle. It must comfort you soon or later.'

The inspiration of her courage seemed to revive Lord Ingram; it terrified Mrs. Chirrup, while Mr. Blennerhasset, unable any longer to contain himself, bid them good-bye, and left the house with Charlie.

'She is a dear, good, brave little girl, is she not?' said Charlie admiringly.

Rohan Blennerhasset did not answer; he only murmured,

'He, too, is in the trap. What witchery is this woman possessed of that she befools us to our faces? for I am as bad as the rest; worse, since I kick against my chains, and they hug theirs.'

Mrs. Chirrup resumed her knitting for a while, then dropped it, took it up again, and finally laid it on her lap, as Lord Ingram left the room.

'Flossy.'

'Yes, godmother.'

It was such a fresh, cheery young voice, she could have struck herself for daring to think it could give an evil command. It gave her courage, and she made a desperate effort.

'My dear, did you never hear anything of—that poor child? you know, my dear.'

'What poor child?'

'That that man said—wanted to say was your uncle's; that was accused of—stealing?'

'What's the good of thinking of her, godmother dear? It can do no good to remember that sad time in connection with the name of Ingram; therefore I never recall it. Follow my example; forget it as though it had never been.'

'I cannot, my dear, I cannot indeed; tell me——'

'What should I tell you? What can I tell you?'

'I don't know, but I am so miserable.'

'There is not the slightest occasion, I assure you. I am not miserable, and surely I would have more cause to

be so than you. The only thing I desire is that you will forget that poor ragged little girl who was driven to steal by her reputed father. We have no need of her. She has dropped out of our lives, out of the records of Ingram. Let it be so.'

It was the first and last time Mrs. Chirrup alluded to the matter. She bowed her head, and took up the cross she had hewn for herself.

CHAPTER V.

THE COMPANION.

THE belle of three seasons, and not married yet. All the world was astonished; for no breath had come to shake Miss Ingram's position, that grew apparently stronger every day, more unassailable. The mad story of the tramp was well-nigh forgotten, all belief in it had died out, and no fresh claimant appeared for the heirship of Ingram. No wonder that she should enjoy herself. No wonder that day by day life grew more brilliant to her.

Not married, but not from lack of lovers. If she had none she could strictly call her own, Ingram's Barony had many, her gold more, her wit and gaiety a few. But still she was not married, still she laughed at and with her admirers, still she nibbled at the puny baits held out, with intense amusement at the great, big clumsy hooks that never caught her. Still she was the same reckless, merry girl, evincing not the slightest desire to be settled comfortably, evidently desirous of nothing beyond enjoyment.

And she had plenty of that. The world is very good-natured to heiresses, even when they are old and ugly and crabbed, much more when they are capable of receiving all it has to give.

Bewitching as ever, she had not yet removed the suspicions of her godmother and Mr. Blennerhasset, though at times she shook them terribly, a process which, after all, only tended to strengthen what was not eradicated.

The season was approaching, and a new whim seized the heiress.

‘Godmother, does it never strike you that I am very lonely?’

The gentle silver-haired, rosy-cheeked beauty looked up at the girl she had made the object of her life, nearer and dearer even than her pet nephew, Charlie Devereux. That was the only reproach she offered to a very ungrateful speech, but in an instant Beatrice was on her knees, the flossy curls bewilderingly entangled in the coquettish lace cap of the elder lady, the white arms round the tiny neck, so smooth, so perfectly curved yet.

‘Don’t think me such a dreadful savage, out and out, darling. Of course I can never want anyone to love while I have you. What I meant was this—am I not sometimes at a disadvantage with girls who have sisters? I should like to have some one to romp with in a lady-like sort of fashion, some one that could help me to do a thousand things girls like to do; keep me company, and so countenance me in a mild flirtation or a cross-country ride.’

‘Well, I thought you had lots of young friends, dear.’

‘Except yourself, not one.’

Mrs. Chirrup smiled at the comic sincerity of the reply, and patted the bright young head on which plotting sat so lightly.

‘Acquaintances, then, you saucy girl. There’s our neighbour’s daughter, Lady Mary, and at the other side, Margaret Dwyer.’

‘Yes, yes, but then I have to invite those girls if I want them. I want some one always with me, some one upon whom I feel I have a sort of a claim.’

‘The nearest approach to that would be a sister-in-law.’

‘Thank you for the suggestion. It shall be attended to at the first opportunity. In the meantime could I not have a companion?’

‘I see nothing to prevent it, if you wish it. It is only natural you should wish for a girl in the house, and I was a selfish old woman not to think of it.’

‘If you were that, you would have thought of it long ago, instead of letting me drag you about.’

‘Lady Cashel would be likely to know some one to suit you. She always has scores of reduced ladies and officers’ daughters wanting homes.’

‘Don’t apply to her, for pity’s sake. I don’t want a reduced lady, who at every step would groan forth her lament for departed glories, and croon over the debasement of the most trifling thing required of her, in spite of the fact of her grammar being unmistakeable witness of a two-pair back, or else third-rate drawing-rooms and twopenny teas. As for the officers’ daughters, a great many look more like officers’ mothers. No, no, I want something brighter, fresher, stronger, something to ner

me on to dare and do, for, godmother, you must know my life is not, cannot always be that of a butterfly.'

She spoke with evident meaning that took the colour from the dainty cheeks of the dear little lady. It was the first time she had alluded to her skeleton. Would she take it out of its gory shroud and exhibit the precise form of the ghastly features? If she did, would it, could it, do any good?

She didn't just then, at any rate. Instead of that she devoted herself, with an energy that appalled Mrs. Chirrup's easy-going notions, to the task of finding a companion.

In what precise way this energy expended itself, Mrs. Chirrup could not exactly tell. She knew that Beatrice was very busy, and drove about a good deal, but she could not find out where, without descending to a curiosity utterly beneath so true a gentlewoman. In a very short time, Miss Ingram announced that she had discovered the person to suit her, with unexceptionable references. Then there was more driving about, and a little fuss preparing a room for the expected inmate.

It was not to be a room for a menial, she begged the housekeeper to understand. A lady who was good enough to be her companion was good enough to require a charming apartment, replete with elegance and comfort.

'Generous as ever,' was Mrs. Chirrup's comment on each fresh extravagance. 'Oh, she cannot have such a bad heart. It is impossible.'

It was a beautiful sunshiny spring morning when Miss Ingram drove to the station to meet the expected companion. The train was not due for a few minutes, and Miss Ingram remained in the pony carriage, just outside

the pretty little country station. The twitter of the birds was suddenly broken into by the rapid tramp of horses' feet. There was that in the quick inspiring sound of the impatient hoofs that brought a deeper colour to the fresh young face, and as she turned, Rohan Blennerhasset and Charlie Devereux drew up. She bowed to the former and extended her hand to Charlie, who, madcap as he was, hovered dangerously near.

'How inviting that pony chaise looks, doesn't it, Blennerhasset?' Charlie said mischievously.

'A gallop will be more exhilarating.'

He had no sooner uttered the words than he bit his lip. Miss Ingram coloured ever so slightly. It was but natural, seeing that she was a belle whose sway all acknowledged save this man, who was barbarian enough to blunt her pretty shafts of coquetry with downright rudeness. Devereux laughed, as only this hazel-eyed, broad-chested young man, with the crown of chestnut curls, could laugh. It was the merry peal of exuberant spirits, undimmed by fear for the future or remorse for the past.

'Then I tell you what. You take my horse home, and I'll crave a seat. A gallop will decidedly be best for you, since you appreciate it.'

'Pardon me, I spoke for your benefit rather than my own,' said the lawyer, with a vigorous effort at politeness. 'Allow me to drive you home, Miss Ingram, and let Devereux take the horses for a gallop.'

It was the first time he had ever offered her an unnecessary courtesy. Even while she answered she was wondering why he did so.

'Thank you,' she said, with a smile that was very

sweet and very cold, 'but I should not like to separate two gentlemen, and I have only one seat to spare, as I wait for a friend.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Flossy,' was Charlie Devereux's undignified rejoinder. 'You don't want us to believe John is pasted to the reins, or that the welfare of the ponies depends on him? He can take the horses home.'

The train rushed past with a deafening whistle. With a graceful bow Miss Ingram took the reins from the servant, and drove up to the station door. Rohan Blennerhasset lifted his hat with haughty politeness, but Charlie dashed after the pony carriage, and dismounted just as Miss Ingram stepped out of the phaeton.

'Well, of all the contrary things that ever I did see, girls are the most contrary,' he said, with a rueful shake of the head. 'Do you really hate that poor man so much, Floss? Must I preach you a sermon on Christian charity?'

A young girl had just alighted from a first-class carriage. Her dress was so simple and elegant that only a lady could have chosen it; her face was of the very highest order of patrician beauty. Great dreamy eyes that looked wistfully about on the little crowd of strangers, who made such a surprising bustle on the little wooden platform, a pure, smooth forehead with arched eyebrows of the darkest brown, a tiny curving mouth, a faint rose tint that might be reality or only fancy in its ideal delicacy on the oval cheeks. Every feature was so exquisitely chiselled, the hands so perfectly moulded in their faultless covering, the figure so lithe, so marvellously graceful in its every curve, that had it not been for the searching expression of the eyes, it might have been some marble evidence of the ancients' surprising conception of human beauty.

Miss Ingram laid her hand on her cousin's arm.

'Oh, Charlie, how very beautiful she is!'

He looked in the direction she indicated, and remained silent. He feared to break the spell. He dreaded the moment when that pure emotionless vision should disturb the artistic repose of attitude, and descend by a sudden gesture to the level of ordinary men and women. Who was she? What did she there alone, this girl, whose diadem of beauty proclaimed her a queen, the lawful sovereign of hearts?

He did not know whether to be pleased or vexed when Miss Ingram approached the stranger, holding out her hand with a smile of welcome. Would the spell be broken?

He was quite decided what to be when he saw that only a glory of life lit up the splendid features; that whether she walked, or stood, or spoke, or smiled, his artist's eye was to be gratified.

'Charlie, my friend, Miss L'Estrange; my madcap cousin, Charlie Devereux, Kate.'

'No, don't believe her, Miss L'Estrange,' said Charlie. 'I'm quite the contrary; altogether of a serious turn. The only fault about me is that I'm too good-natured; and when any of my young lady cousins—ahem!—take it into their heads to play pranks, they always settle it on me. That's how I've got such a bad name, I assure you.'

Miss Ingram was in a thoroughly good humour when she got back to the carriage. To her unspeakable surprise Mr. Blennerhasset renewed his request for a seat after an introduction to the stranger. He could not tell why he did so. He spoke and acted like a man who did so, not only against his better judgment, but absolutely against his will.

Miss Ingram bowed assent with a strange mixture of pleasure and pain. He had never before asked a favour twice—never even once except when common politeness demanded it. Was it the supreme beauty of this young girl, whom she and she alone had brought to Ingram Court, that had effected this transformation? And yet he had been near loving her once. Yes, very near. She knew that. Was his allegiance so easily transferred?

The two ladies sat with their faces to the ponies, Miss Ingram driving, the gentlemen opposite.

Miss L'Estrange listened with a shy smile while Charlie did the honours of Ingram. Suddenly a change passed over her face. The faint but exquisite tinge of colour was displaced by an ashen hue. Mr. Blennerhasset, who had been looking quietly at her, was struck by the change. Had he glanced at Miss Ingram, he would have seen the paleness reflected in her face too, but his attention was riveted to the countenance of the companion.

'Are you ill, Miss L'Estrange?'

A frightened beseeching look came into her eyes—a look that was familiar, and yet, queerly enough, reminded him of a hunted animal.

'No ——'

'Ill?' interposed Miss Ingram, as she actually struck the spirited ponies with an energy that caused them to prance wildly, and then dash forward at full speed. 'You seem to forget that variety is the most charming thing under the sun, and the most charming face is, therefore, the most changeable.'

'At least it cannot be denied that you are an example of your theory,' the lawyer returned, his attention partially diverted from the figure of a man who, standing by

the roadside, was visible to him as the ponies dashed on. Partially, but not quite, for there was something in the weird grandeur of that lonely figure standing out in solitary misery against the brightness and freshness of that glorious spring morning that attracted him; a something which involuntarily, almost unconsciously, he connected with the sudden pallor of the surpassingly beautiful face before him.

Miss Ingram turned her attention to pulling in the ponies, and allowed the ball of conversation to drop. Mr. Blennerhasset fell to studying the face that was so new yet so familiar.

‘I do not know her, I feel certain, or I would at once recollect both the name and the face, yet I am positive I have seen her somewhere, sometime. Was it in a former existence, or in some separation of soul and body, when the spirit took note of shapes, and was heedless of details? Surely it is a face with a story, but of what? Of evil yielded to, or struggled against? Which is it?’

CHAPTER VI.

CATCH ME, CHARLIE.

‘At least confess, godmother, that my taste is irreproachable. Could I have selected a more charming companion?’

‘Charlie seems to think you could not.’

Beatrice smiled, and Mrs. Chirrup added, uneasily,

‘He really seems very much struck. Since last night he has done nothing but watch her.’

‘Surely that does not annoy you?’

‘It does, as it happens,’ and Mrs. Chirrup spoke testily. ‘You must know I have never quite yielded myself to the belief that the family compact of Ingram and Devereux was to be dishonoured. Although there was no formal engagement of late, I never gave up the hope of seeing the word of Ralph Ingram redeemed.’

‘And that word was,’ Beatrice said softly, ‘that the heiress of Ingram should wed the young son of his friend.’

‘Yes, that was the promise your uncle gave at the birth of his daughter, a promise which he renewed at the death of his wife. When his daughter was——’

‘Drowned——’

‘And you stepped into her place, her duties as well as privileges devolved upon you. Your uncle clings to the hope of fulfilling his promise, in spite of what you and Charlie said three years ago; in fact it is the one thing of interest left him.’

‘It was a very foolish promise,’ said Miss Ingram, still in the same peculiar soft, low tone. ‘Nevertheless, it shall not be my fault if it is not fulfilled.’

Mrs. Chirrup uttered a cry of joy; the next moment a pang of fear thrilled her heart. She had caught sight of two figures standing in the glorious sunlight of the early morning. A young man, handsome and noble, with his proud head bent towards the young girl, whose lovely wistful eyes were looking into his daring hazel orbs. What was she doing, this silver-haired lady? Was she interfering with destiny again?

No such fears disturbed Miss Ingram. A magnificent smile irradiated the face so different to that of the beautiful stranger, so irregular in its features, so variable in expression, yet with such a power of showing the soul within.

‘Yes, he will love her, he cannot help it. And she will love him, she must, surely. He is so true, so brave, so grand in everything, this dashing, reckless cousin of mine, that if I were not a fool I should love him myself. Ah! how happy we shall all be then. How I shall enjoy my revenge. And you will come so humbly, Monsieur Blennerhasset, and beg my pardon for your suspicions. But I shall not listen to your apologies. No, I shall not listen. I will not see your regret, I will only remember your cruelty; I will show you that you are not the only one who can be relentlessly just; I shall show you that I have profited by the lessons you give me daily and hourly with your metallic voice, that has never an inflexion of a kindness that is not scorn, with your stern blue eyes, that are like those of Nemesis when she withholds her lightnings only from contemptuous pity. And you will entreat me to forget all that, but I shall not listen to your entreaties; no, no, I shall not forget.’

‘I don’t think they intend coming to breakfast. Hadn’t you better call them?’

‘They’re positively out of sight.’ Miss Ingram darted out of the window and across the lawn to where a straggling, picturesque, moss-covered stone wall, not very high and very uneven, separated a part of the lawn from the park. There was a gate, of course, but Beatrice was in too good spirits to require such conveniences. Up the end she got, and ran along the wall like a disobedient

child, in her white dress and blue sash, until she caught sight of Miss L'Estrange under a fragrant pine.

'Boys, boys,' she shouted, clapping her hands in sheer excitement and exuberance of vitality, 'come to breakfast.'

The clear musical voice gave one the impression of anything rather than a decorous full-grown young lady, much less one who had been the belle of three seasons.

'Upon my word, Flossy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said the dignified voice of Charlie Devereux.

'I ought to be, but I'm sorry to say I ain't.'

'Then I am for you. Up on a wall, scampering like a tomboy. Go home, child, you've shocked me out of all propriety for the day.'

'I deny that flat. It's impossible to lose what you never had. Come on, Kate, I'll help you up.'

'Miss L'Estrange and I will go round by the gate, Miss Ingram.'

'All right, I'll come too. Catch me, Charlie.'

The ground here was much lower than at the other side, sloping into a tiny valley. The gentleman behind the pine tree, startled at the prospect of such a leap, sprang forward and caught the laughing madcap as she descended.

She looked up in dismay at the haughty countenance of Mr. Blennerhasset, never more stern than now. Without even a salutation she turned her crimson face to her cousin, who greeted her with uncontrollable laughter.

'I asked you to catch me, Charlie.'

'I couldn't have been in time, Floss, and I'm sure you ought to be polite enough to thank Blennerhasset. I can

assure you it's not everyone he would sustain such a weight in his arms. I have seen him let the dowager Countess of Kerry hold her cup for a quarter of an hour, waiting for some one to take it.'

She was not a bit changed since she had charged down, in her unreasoning happiness, on Constance Bouverie in the chequered glade. She was still the same unrestrained child, with her passion for violent exercise. A pretty one indeed, for him, Rohan Blennerhasset, to think of for a wife—a girl who raced along a stone wall not a foot wide, high here and low there, and had not the grace to be ashamed of it, or to be anything but angry that he should be the luckless individual to catch her.

What made him accept the invitation to breakfast, and tie his horse to a tree till a servant should come round? It was a question that puzzled him no less than it did Miss Ingram. He had often refused more ceremonious invitations, Beatrice said to herself. Why, then, did he accept now? Again the thought of the previous day crossed her with a sickening fear in its train. Was it the glamour of her companion's beauty. She thought it must be; and as for Rohan Blennerhasset, he thought it must be anything but what it really was. Not even to himself would he allow that the momentary touch of a tiny hand on his shoulder, the wave of tangled curls across his cheek, could have unmanned him, and rendered him incapable of acting with his usual Spartan hardness. By the time he had reached Mrs. Chirrup's breakfast-room, he had quite convinced himself that his motive for remaining was pure curiosity as to Miss L'Estrange, whom he felt convinced he had seen before, though a faint glimmering of something else

caused him to wrap himself up in more than usually impenetrable defence of haughty indifference.

Such a merry breakfast table as it was. Miss Ingram had quite made up her mind that she didn't care if twenty Mr. Blennerhassets scowled at her for a romp on a wall. It was nothing wicked; and what wasn't wicked couldn't be wrong, and what wasn't wrong must be right. Miss L'Estrange, with those wonderful beseeching eyes of hers, completely disarmed Mrs. Chirrup of all suspicion or jealousy of her surprising beauty, and converted the single-hearted lovely little lady into her firm friend.

'Poor young thing!' Mrs. Chirrup said remorsefully, as she noted the sweep of the heavy lashes on the pale cheek, 'she has seen trouble, it is in her eyes; and yet I must needs be harsh and suspicious. Heaven forgive me!'

Charlie Devereux very soon had plans drawn out for the day's amusement—plans, in every one of which Mr. Blennerhasset, to his amazement, found himself included, and out of which it was impossible to get. In vain he struggled. Charlie, with a villainous laugh, drew his meshes the tighter.

'Don't talk nonsense!'—that was a favourite piece of advice with Charlie. 'Don't you see it would be impossible for me to look after two ladies and drive a four-in-hand at the same time? And the drag is the only possible conveyance to Derrynane; it's much too far for a light phaeton, and they might as well stay at home as be boxed up in the family hearse.'

Excuses were of no avail; with a diabolical ingenuity Charlie turned each one presented into a reason for obeying him, until politeness forbade any further being offered, and

Miss Ingram summoned her companion to a conference in her room.

‘How do you like it, Kate?’ she asked, as she sat down on an ottoman beside her friend, twining her arms round her.

‘How do I like it? I should be the most ungrateful of human beings not to like it well. You are all too good to me.’

‘Have I not forbidden you to talk like that? What have you to be grateful for? Except, perhaps, the deep love I have for you, Kate.’

‘It is just for that I am so grateful. That includes everything else.’

‘You are wrong, my dear. I would give you all else, even though I did not love you.’

‘Ah, I should not like that.’

‘There is no fear of it. Now, what are you going to wear? I am your majesty’s mistress of the robes for the present.’

‘No, no; it is royalty stooping to take note of her subject,’ said Kate L’Estrange, as she looked with admiration at the animated brilliancy of the belle of Dublin. There was a charming deference in the tone of the taller and statelier girl to the wilful young lady that had not escaped the lawyer’s notice, and which he wondered at as the result of a consideration—*£ s. d.* It was in vain that Miss Ingram deprecated this deference, and demonstrated the perfect right her companion had to all the good things provided for her. It was in vain she flung aside contemptuously the barriers of rank and fortune, not to lower herself, but to draw the hired stranger up to an equality in all things. Miss L’Estrange, with the persistency that

sometimes marks quiet, even timid, natures, would not be denied her right to do homage to one whose nobility she could comprehend and appreciate. At length Miss Ingram found herself provoked by this determined submission into something of that delicious imperiousness which was natural to her, but which she would have laid aside with Kate had she been permitted, the wilful authority that at the same time bewitched and alienated Rohan Blennerhasset.

Having dictated the attire her companion was to wear she retired, and summoned Cerise. A happy smile hovered on her lips as she submitted to the maid, and occasionally she murmured to herself,

‘Yes, he will love her, and she will love him. My promise to godmother. Ah! What of that?’

It did not seem to trouble her very much, for she only laughed merrily to herself. A sigh she could scarcely control checked her mirth.

‘I shall have courage to go through with it. I do not do myself the injustice to fear that I shall fail. Oh, no. But the afterwards—I must not think of that.’

Was she at last beginning to dread remorse, this bright young lady, who for three years had dispensed favours and received homage to which she was no more entitled than the veriest beggar?

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUET.

A CARRIAGE with the Ingram arms stopped at the corner of a narrow street in the village of Rosehill, about ten miles from Ingram. Two ladies stepped out, and proceeded on foot through the narrow, tortuous windings. The dress of both was exceedingly simple and rich, and an air of distinction pervaded their every movement. Strange persons to be walking in a narrow lane with high houses on either side, to stop at one of the dirtiest and dingiest of the dwellings enquiring if Miss Joy lived there. The question was addressed to a flabby-looking child, busy in the gutter kneading dough for an abundance of mud pies, who looked up in stupid wonderment at the ladies.

‘Who is it?’

‘Miss Joy.’

The child stared for a minute, then returned to her kneading, remarking, ‘I dunno.’

A little urchin at marbles stopped his game to listen. He looked a brighter subject, but on the question being addressed to him he shook his head.

‘The dressmaker of the theatre,’ the lady explained.

‘Ah! maybe it’s the witch you mean; she lives up there,’ and he pointed to the topmost window of a house a story higher than any other in the street. It was worth trying, the ladies decided, and they made their way to the house indicated.

High up above her neighbours, with a whole attic to

herself, the dressmaker of the Theatre Royal sat at work. Being a small person, she was perched on a high stool by the window, and drawn up close to her was a table littered with bright garments ; a clown's costume, a harlequin's jacket, a columbine's skirt, a Spanish hat with the plume torn, a velvet doublet, a white satin dress rather dragged at the bottom, and an enormous quantity of yellow ribbon.

She worked with a will, this very small dressmaker. Only now and then she raised her head to nod to the twittering canary, whose cage was perched exactly opposite.

A genius in a small way, the dressmaker of the Theatre Royal had a passion for devising quaint picturesque costumes after a fashion of her own. These costumes had become immensely popular, and she had as much as she could do, day and night.

'How happy I am !' she said several times, as if to impress the fact upon herself. 'I have plenty of work, and good pay ; I have a room and two windows, and a canary all to myself. What more can I want ? Oh, yes, I am very happy.'

Her quick ear caught the sound of footsteps on what she called her own stairs.

'If it's grown-ups they've come to stare, and they'll go away with an excuse ; if it's children they've come for the same, and they'll go away with a giggle. Which do I hate most ; the excuse or the giggle, the big or the little people ?'

'Come in, come in,' she said impatiently, as a knock came to the door. 'See what you want to see, and you'll go away the sooner.'

The rich colour suddenly dyed her face, but she did not get off her stool.

'You're welcome as the daylight, my dear,' she said, with a sort of protecting fondness, as a young girl put her arm round her. 'Sit down, Miss Ingram, if you please; I don't stand up, you see, because it takes me so long to get up again.'

'You're not going to make a stranger of me,' said Miss Ingram.

'You're like a sunbeam coming into the room,' Jenny said, looking at the wilful heiress as she drew her chair close to the table. Then she stroked the fair young head beside her.

'And what is Kate like, Jenny?'

'A bit of ivy, just; nothing else in the world.'

'And yourself?'

'Me! sure I'm only like what I am—a witch.'

'Then you're a dear, nice little witch,' Miss Ingram said, pushing away the table that she might come closer 'and you must tell us our fortunes.'

'Sorrow bit till I have heard all the news.'

Then began a merry babel of tongues that irritated the canary into a prolonged whistle almost deafening, till Jenny Joy took the cage and shook it.

'And so he didn't know you?' she said, turning from the bird. 'But you knew him soon enough; and yet it was you saved his life, not he yours.'

'I saw Mr. Devereux more than he saw me, you know,' Kate said.

'He saw you once; was not that enough?'

'But I have changed.'

'And those are the people you were afraid to go among,

for fear of whom you begged Miss Ingram to leave you in obscurity. Now you see that you needn't be frightened about it. What will they offer you that will weigh you down? Not even gratitude.'

'Don't be too hard on Charlie, Jenny; I wanted you to be particular friends,' Miss Ingram said, in her pretty imperious way.

'Oh! to think he should not know her after having seen her with a knowledge that should have printed her face on his memory. If I saw one to whom I knew I owed my life, do you think I could forget? Oh! my pearl, my pure precious pearl, go among these people, they will have none like you so good, so true. And to think he shouldn't have known you! Ah! you don't know the dream that man has destroyed this day, worse luck to him.'

'What dream, Jenny?'

'Oh! a pretty, pretty dream, mavourneen. I sit here dreaming all alone while I work, and I dreamed a sweet charming dream that seemed so true, that has turned out so worthless.'

'Generally the way with dreams.'

'Don't say that. I can't do without my dreams, achora. I can't do without my belief that they'll come true some time, so don't try to make me wise.'

'But what was this particular dream?' Miss Ingram enquired coaxingly.

'Pretty, mavrone! But no good, you see. I'll tell it to you some day, Miss Ingram, when I have replaced it.'

'What are these intended for?'

'That's a Spanish lady's dress; and that's a bride's.'

'Can I try this on, Jenny?'

'To be sure you can. That's a gipsy's jacket and petticoat.'

Miss Ingram proceeded to array herself in the brown petticoat and scarlet jacket, merely removing her lace scarf. Peals of laughter broke from the three, as Miss Ingram placed the dilapidated hat back on her head.

'Now if I had only a tambourine I'd sing you a song.'

'There's one in that corner.'

'Charming. Now, Kate, you'll please to stop laughing, and sit down there next to Jenny.'

The sense of the ludicrous was lost in the charm of the song the sweet young voice sang, and a knocking at the door was unheeded. Jenny Joy leant forward on her table, her sharp chin on her hands, her elfish eyes fixed on this fair — but not all orthodox — impersonation of a gipsy countess. Kate, sitting beside her, was scarcely less absorbed, and the knocking was repeated. At length it ceased, and Miss Ingram had sung the first part of what was really a duet. She was preparing to begin the second part, when a manly voice took up the strain at the other side of the door. The three girls stared at each other in amazement, but after the first moment of surprise, Miss Ingram, still standing in the middle of the room, continued the tinkling accompaniment. When the part for her voice came, she took up her part with an *engouement* that showed she was not in the least disconcerted by the unexpected aid.

'It's certainly Charlie,' she said, with a merry laugh.

'And supposing it's Charlie,' retorted the voice outside, 'don't you think Charlie has earned a right to come in?'

Another peal of laughter, and Miss Ingram called out, 'Come in, Charlie.'

The door opened, admitting Charlie Devereux and Rohan Blennerhasset. The two gentlemen stopped short at sight of Miss Ingram's remarkable costume—the lawyer in somewhat disgusted surprise, Charlie in a burst of ludicrous mirth that all his efforts at politeness could not suppress, and in which Miss Ingram could not help joining to save her life. She had, like most of her race, an unfortunately keen sense of the ridiculous, and though she would have given worlds for Mr. Blennerhasset not to have seen her, yet the thought of how she must look to him was irresistibly tickling.

‘Oh, you look so nice, Flossy.’

‘I know,’ she said coolly, quite determined not to let Mr. Blennerhasset's cold glance fathom her discomfiture. ‘But what brought you here, Mr. Devereux?’

For answer he advanced to the dressmaker of the Theatre Royal, stretching out his hand, a bright smile on his frank, handsome face.

‘I heard you lived here, Miss Joy, and I took the liberty of coming to see you, though I don't know if you will remember one out of so many patients.’

‘My memory is pretty good, Mr. Devereux,’ she responded tartly, ‘but I don't remember your friend.’

‘Mr. Blennerhasset, Miss Jenny Joy,’ said Charlie, with the gravity of a master of the ceremonies. The lawyer bowed, and Jenny Joy fixed her bright black eyes on him.

‘Young ladies, maybe you'd sit on the settle; there's only the two chairs. Oh, sit down, sit down,’ she continued irritably, ‘I hate people standing about like pillars.’

Thus bidden, they sat down, Charlie drawing his chair very close to the table.

‘You're not a bit changed, Miss Jenny.’

'Miss Joy, if you please.'

'Do you remember how you used to scold me?'

'If I do, I remember how you used to deserve it.'

'You very nearly pulled my hair one morning.'

'Not that you had much to pull, for all you would take your cap off. My heart was nearly broke with you for a fidgeting madcap.'

'How did you come here, Flossy?'

'On my feet.'

'So did I. Now that's what I call remarkable. But you never told me you knew Miss Joy.'

'Which shows I don't tell everything.'

'Most ladies can keep secrets that suit them,' Mr. Blennerhasset remarked drily. His chair was drawn a little behind the settle, and Miss Ingram felt that his contemptuous, criticising eye was resting on her the whole time. Her colour deepening, her eyes flashing under an undefinable feeling of resentment, her hair loosened partly by the hasty removal of the high-crowned hat, the scarlet jacket coming up to the white throat, she looked provokingly pretty. She allowed Mr. Blennerhasset and Miss L'Estrange to converse, while Charlie was employed in 'butthering up and slithering down' the sharp-faced little nurse who had bullied him so unmercifully three years ago; but Mr. Blennerhasset began to be unpleasantly conscious that, though his remarks were addressed to the gentle, aristocratic girl who sat nearest to him, both his eyes and his thoughts were with the perverse young lady who had so little regard for the proprieties as to come to the attic of a theatrical dressmaker to sing songs and trick herself out in stage costume.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY DAUGHTER WAS AN OUTCAST—YOU ARE A LADY.

‘GODMOTHER, just guess the news,’ Miss Ingram exclaimed, as she held up an open letter. ‘No, you’ll never guess.’

‘Then there’s no use trying.’

‘Aunt Beavoin is coming to pay us a visit.’

‘It is very kind of her.’

‘Now don’t be satirical, you darling little godmother; it doesn’t suit you one bit. But confess you are astonished. You might as well. As for me, nothing can surprise me now; not the news of an inundation of snakes.’

‘Flossy, you forget that your aunt Beavoin is my nearest relation, and it is only through her I have had the undisputed care of yourself.’

‘For which I owe her gratitude, so I’ll not say another word. When did you expect my uncle?’

‘To-night, my dear.’

‘Ah! it will be the first time they have met since that season four years ago.’

‘Yes,’ and Mrs. Chirrup’s sweet voice trembled.

‘To-night, to-night,’ mused Miss Ingram. ‘Shall I have courage to go through with it? I must—I will. No suspicion must mar my *éclaircissement*, for which I have waited so patiently. No slur must come upon my triumph. All must be ready to witness, not from faith, but from eyesight, and unblinded by either partiality or prejudice, to the unblemished nobility of the future Baroness Ingram.’

Lady Devereux arrived at Ingram that afternoon late.

Having established her in her apartments, Miss Ingram proceeded to seek her companion.

‘My uncle arrives this evening, Kate.’

Miss L'Estrange grew pale as death.

‘Let me go,’ she said, rising from her seat and speaking imploringly. ‘I cannot meet one to whom I once brought so much sorrow.’

But Miss Ingram went over to her and put her arms round her.

‘You must not let your feelings run away with you. It is not like my brave Kate. If you wronged him, you did it innocently. It is necessary that you should meet him, but, my dear, it is also necessary that you should not betray yourself.’

‘How can I help it?’ said the girl, shuddering. ‘How can I face those grey hairs, those lips that never smile under the disgrace of my acts?’

‘But have I not told you that we must make amends? That by our constant watchful care he may be brought to forget his sorrow? Oh, Kate, it is a grand object; it is worth a struggle.’

She had touched the right chord. The girl looked up wonderingly.

‘Do you think I can help to do that?’

‘None so well.’

‘If I could think that a life's service would be even a partial atonement, and not an aggravation, how willingly would I give it.’

Lady Devereux had completed her toilet in good time. She was alone in the drawing-room when Lord Ingram arrived, and he came to greet her before going upstairs. It was nearly four years since she had seen her brother-in-

law, and then he was a broken-down, disgraced old man. She bore little love to the husband of her dead sister, this haughty woman, but she felt some compassion as she wondered how he would look ; and when he came to welcome her, she advanced to meet him almost kindly—courteous she always was.

‘I am glad to see you,’ he said, with mechanical politeness. ‘I am afraid you will find Ingram very dull after your merry east country ; but we will make it as lively as possible.’

She did not answer for a moment, but remained looking at him. Yes, he was aged, worn, and weary. The proud head was silvered, the eagle eye was hollow, the scornful but beautifully chiselled mouth was pale and compressed.

‘I did not come to see Ingram Place, but to see you,’ she said at length.

‘Thank you, Beavoin,’ he replied listlessly.

‘Sit here, Ingram ; you must be tired.’

‘The Ingrams are not easily tired. I have only travelled a short distance to-day.’

‘Perhaps you would prefer to retire at once. Don’t stand on ceremony ; I shall make myself quite at home, and Beatrice or Agatha will be down presently.’

‘Not at all, my lady. There will be ample time for the duties of the toilet, without leaving you so abruptly.’

‘Pray sit down then,’ she said impatiently.

‘Not while you remain standing,’ he replied, with a persistent ceremoniousness that reminded her of three years ago. An increased punctiliousness was the only sign he gave of what he had suffered ; a scrupulous exacting of the deference due to him was all that reminded you

of the terrible wound to his pride that time could not heal. Lady Devereux sat down, and he occupied a couch opposite.

They sat talking of trivial matters, each full of another subject which must not be touched. She was a superbly handsome woman, with a gracious smile, a regal condescension rustling in every movement.

‘What an idiot I am to ever think that if I had kept that wretched, hungry girl, I could by any possibility present her to Beavoin Devereux as her niece, the promised wife of her son,’ he thought, as he sat and looked at her, and spoke polite nothings with his lips. ‘It is better as it is. Why am I not content always to think so?’

‘What an effect the imposture has upon the man,’ Lady Devereux whispered to herself. ‘Has he the insolence to suppose that there was even a shadow of truth in it? That by any possibility my sister’s child could descend to the level of a common thief?’

Low musical voices sounded in the gallery, then a pattering of footsteps, not unlike the wilful tread of children; the drawing-room door was thrown open, and two young girls entered laughing, but stopped suddenly at sight of Lord Ingram and Lady Devereux. The nobleman turned round and half rose at sight of ladies, but sank back pale and breathless.

‘Introduce your friend, Miss Ingram,’ said Lady Devereux, displeased at what looked like awkwardness and want of manners. But Beatrice did not heed her; she was watching her uncle with a peculiar intentness. Lady Devereux turning to him noticed his death-like pallor, and her startled gaze following his, she saw Miss L’Estrange transfixed with a sort of horror. Lord Ingram, with a

sudden effort, rose from his chair, and stretched out his hands to her.

‘Is it?——’

‘No, no, no,’ she murmured, shivering at the thought of a detection which would render it impossible for Miss Ingram to befriend her.

‘He will certainly frighten the girl out of her wits, and cause needless *esclandre*,’ was Lady Devereux’s comment. ‘The man thinks everyone he meets is his daughter.’

Advancing to Kate, she gently motioned her out of the room, whispering, ‘Do not be alarmed, my dear, his lordship is not quite well;’ but Lord Ingram was too quick for her, and drew the frightened girl beneath the chandelier. As he scanned her appearance with an anxious, trembling gaze, not an iota of her dress, not a line of her face escaped him. As she looked up into the wan, haggard face, the fear faded out of her eyes, only a sublime compassion looked out from their mournful depths. The one characteristic by which he could best have recognised her was gone.

His hands dropped listlessly by his side, an expression of unutterable misery crept like a grey shadow over his face.

‘You are right—it is “No, no, no.” My daughter was a poor untaught outcast, trained to vice. You are honest, well brought up, a lady; goodness is in your face. How could I mistake you for my daughter?’

He sank down in the chair, desolate, heart-broken. Oh, how she longed to comfort him! how the pitying spirit within her craved to soothe his wounded soul, to tell him that she was indeed that poor waif, but that she was not his daughter!

‘Leave him now,’ Lady Devereux sighed; and the two girls withdrew to another room.

‘Kate,’ whispered Miss Ingram, as she knelt beside her friend, ‘has it never struck you that that man—your father—might have deceived you?’

It never struck Kate how much was involved in this question, and she answered it simply.

‘No, oh, no; I am not Lord Ingram’s daughter. I don’t want to be,’ she added, and large tears rolled down her cheeks. She wept for that poor old man, in whose grief and loneliness and abasement she had been an instrument, and Miss Ingram wept too—she could not tell why, except for sympathy.

‘Dry your eyes, Kate,’ whispered Miss Ingram. ‘They are all in the drawing-room except uncle, and we had better go in.’

They entered quietly. Lord Ingram had refused any concession to bodily weakness in the shape of dining in his room, and they awaited his descent.

Mrs. Chirrup and Lady Devereux sat on a couch together, talking in a low tone. Mr. Blennerhasset and Charlie left their post on the terrace, as Miss Ingram and her companion ensconced themselves in a recess.

‘Why, we’re all in the dumps to-night,’ complained Charlie. ‘Which is it, my majestic parent, or your iceberg of an uncle, that’s the wet blanket, Flossy?’

‘I think it must be yourself, Mr. Devereux. I feel damp directly you come near me.’

‘Come away, Blennerhasset; and if we address them again to-night—But stay; it’s not fair to punish you, Miss L’Estrange, for that little girl’s impertinence.’

Lady Devereux, whose calm glance had surveyed the

group, saw that her son had first gone to Beatrice, but that after a while he was much nearer to Miss L'Estrange's chair than his cousin's. Could it be that this hired companion, who might have dropped out of the sky for aught she knew, was seeking to wile the hope of Devereux from the heiress of Ingram? It was a disturbing thought to that regally-robed woman, who looked so placidly proud, as if no external circumstance could by any possibility affect her. Something else disturbed her too. She remembered that the exclamation and expression of Miss L'Estrange had been more that of one dreading a recognition than of a young girl suddenly startled by an unexpected occurrence. What did it mean? Did she know anything? The common report, doubtless; but anything beyond?

Unconsciously her eyes rested as if fascinated on the beautiful profile, and when Miss L'Estrange turned, she coloured under the earnestness of the scrutiny she was subjected to. Lady Devereux, at length roused from the reverie that had been suggested, she could not tell how or why, by something in the sweep of the eyelashes, in the peculiar expression of the face now turned restlessly to her, perceived the vivid blush, and true to the instincts of her nature she swept forward. Placing her hand kindly on the shoulder of the companion she smiled down on her, observing—

'You have beautiful eyes, Miss L'Estrange—that is all.'

She moved away, her rich velvet robe draping her like a princess as she was, a smile half mournful still lingering on her handsome haughty face.

'Can she suspect me?' thought the girl. She was a coward, she had been one always, and she could not face

unshrinkingly the thought of being compelled to leave this haven of refuge. And yet it would be impossible, she felt, for even her brave friend to harbour the daughter of a convict, an acknowledged thief, in the face of the world.

CHAPTER IX.

ENQUIRIES.

‘PRAY, Agatha, has Charlie been long so very attentive to Miss L’Estrange?’ Lady Devereux enquired, as she and Mrs. Chirrup sat on the terrace next morning. Mrs. Chirrup looked up from her knitting with a pleasant smile.

‘Charlie is always my chivalrous boy—mine more than yours, Beavoin; but there is no cause for alarm. Flossy has consented to redeem the word her uncle gave your dead husband.’

‘Is there a formal engagement?’

‘I don’t know. But you do not surely suppose there can be any obstacle on his part?’

‘Not unless that girl entangles him.’

‘Let us be just, Beavoin,’ and the fairy godmother looked up at her younger and statelier companion. ‘The girl is no common adventuress.’

‘By-the-by, who is she? I am getting curious on the subject.’

‘Who is she?’ Mrs. Chirrup repeated. ‘Well, I hardly know, except that she is the companion of my

niece, and a sweet gentle girl, always ready to give up her ride or walk to read to me.'

'Then you know positively nothing of her antecedents?'

'Well, no, I suppose not. If I ever did, I have forgotten. I suppose Flossy does; but then the girl is well-bred, agreeable, unselfish to a degree I never saw in any, young or old. What more would you have?'

'So that for anything you know to the contrary, this Miss L'Estrange might be the very offscouring of the city?'

'Excuse me, Beavoin, I never said that.'

'You say you know nothing——'

'Of her family. Nothing. But I have not had her in the house for so long without satisfying myself as to her character from what, after all, is the most satisfactory—internal evidence.'

Lady Devereux smiled, and stooped to kiss the sweet white brow that was so much smoother than her own, though the hair that rippled over it was silver, not chestnut brown.

'I understand you perfectly, Agatha,' she said, with a smile.

It was perfectly plain to Lady Devereux that her dashing handsome boy, with his mother's chestnut curls and hazel eyes, with his father's gay, genial, unsuspicious nature, was at the feet of this hired stranger, who might be a chandler's daughter.

The afternoon splendour fell over mother and son as they stood together by the marble fountain. He held in his hand a telegram from head-quarters.

'I shall have to leave immediately, mother.'

'I shall not prevent you,' she said, after a struggle.

'I shall not ask you to exchange, as I always said. Go with my consent.'

'I shall come back a general at least, mother. Won't you be prond ?'

'I shall always be proud of you, Charlie, famous or obscure. If you were a general, I should still be more proud of my son than of the hero.'

'Going away, Charlie ?' said Flossy, in an accent of dismay.

'Yes, almost at once, Flossy,' he said, striving to speak cheerfully.

'And you are not sorry,' she said reproachfully.

He looked at her with a gravity she had seldom seen this gay, dashing young soldier wear.

'War is threatened. Our regiment has the honour of being the first ordered abroad. Would you tell me to act a cowardly part ?'

'Ah, I understand,' she said, with a sob, as she passed her hand through his arm. 'Well, you will—you will speak before you go ?'

They had understood each other a long time, these cousins, and he knew well what she meant.

'Why should I do that, Floss ?' he whispered, leaning down. 'If anything happened, she would be a widow in heart, but without a widow's privileges.'

'You are right, Charlie, and I am wrong,' she said submissively. 'But this right is hard sometimes to comprehend.'

Lady Devereux was no spy, but as she stood at the end of the terrace, she saw the two who stood in the glade. She saw the tears in the girl's eyes; she saw the hands interlaced on her cousin's arm.

'At least Agatha is right for once,' said Lady Devereux, as she turned away. 'If the family compact is broken, the disgrace will be Charlie's.'

Two hours afterwards the chaise stood at the door ; and waving his cap to the group on the terrace in his merry boyish fashion, Charlie Devereux drove away. Fearless, buoyant, daring was the last expression he showed them ; his merry ringing cheer was the last sound they heard.

CHAPTER X.

NO BIGGER THAN A MAN'S HAND.

It might have been thought that now Charlie was gone Lady Devereux's anxiety might have disappeared. Instead of that, her interest in Miss L'Estrange increased most unaccountably. Why she watched, or what she suspected, she would have found it hard to say ; yet still she did watch and suspect.

Kate knew she was watched ; knew that every look, every movement, was closely scanned and analysed for the discovery of some double meaning. She quailed before the haughty eyes that so piercingly questioned her, while the silvery, flute-like voice made some polite enquiries that would have been merely impertinent curiosity if made by anyone but Lady Devereux. She had apparently a right to know all she asked, and most people yielded her the privilege.

'You like the country, Miss L'Estrange ?'

'Yes ; I like the peace and stillness.'

'Dear me. But perhaps you were brought up in the country ?'

'No.'

'And your parents, do they still live in town ?'

'Yes—that is, I believe—my father does.'

'I knew a Mr. L'Estrange, of Kildare Street. Any relation ?'

'No—I don't know.'

Kate had been always a coward, and she could not to save her life help blushing and trembling and stammering before the direct question.

Day by day, hour by hour, she felt detection hovering over her. At times it seemed as if the bat-like wings flapped against her face, freezing the very life within her. Then it would be evaded for a while, but only that it might come in overwhelming force at last.

Strange to say, from the hour of Miss Ingram's receiving her aunt's letter, her fear had worn the majestic shape of Beavoin Devereux, dim and intangible as report at first, deepening by acquaintance into startling reality.

Yet still she stayed. An attraction that outweighed all fear of the grief and shame of detection kept her there ; a longing desire that would not be denied, a passionate craving to do some little thing towards comforting that desolate old man from whom she had fled three years ago ; whom she would have rendered doubly desolate by remaining. She found a pleasure she could not comprehend in secretly watching one to whose great affliction she had added the bitterest drop ; in performing simple services for him, spite of Lady Devereux's watchful eyes ; in watching a pleased look, of which she could not guess the secret pain,

come into his eyes as he recognised some act of hers, and thought it was what his daughter might have been, but never could be now, instead of the weary gaze that made her heart ache.

He was a proud man, prouder in his affliction than in his prosperity; and the sight of this young girl, while it stirred up every feeling of his nature, while it excited to the full every legitimate craving for the love of his child, hardened his heart to that poor outcast, who had wrapped his honours in shame three years ago.

So it was that when physical prostration came he could not bring himself to talk of his sorrow to Miss L'Estrange, whose pleading, wistful eyes would have dropped pitying tears on the yet bleeding wound, and whose low sad voice moved him like the burden of a far off melody learnt in happier days, laden with golden memories. At such times he would picture to himself that had the baby been left him she might have grown up as fair, as graceful, as thoughtful; but the figure he had seen three years ago he tried to banish from his mind. Sometimes the enquiry would obtrude itself, Would it have been possible for that poor ragged child to have gone back to the purity of the baby, to have attained the loveliness of this stranger? Ah! no. It could never have been, so let her be forgotten; ay, though the task of forgetting should bring him to his grave.

And all the time Lady Devereux watched and suspected, though her far away suspicions were no bigger than a man's hand.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE REASONING.

THERE was seldom a week now that did not bring Rohan Blennerhasset at some time or other. Why he came he could not tell; but come he did, until at last he began to reason the thing properly out.

As I said before, Mr. Blennerhasset believed in no action whose spring could not be traced to a reason. So far he was right; every action has a motive, whether we know it or not. But sometimes the very happiest of our feelings, the best of our actions, spring from a source either entirely hidden, or which being revealed seems inadequate to our purblind vision to produce such results. This fact Mr. Blennerhasset would never bring himself to accept; the cause must be not only worthy the effect, but it must be so to his ken as well. On those who received the goods the gods gave without question as to the how, the why, and the whence, he bestowed unhesitatingly the epithet of fools. As to whom the title of philosopher would be most applicable, himself or the fools, I leave an open question.

Mr. Blennerhasset, therefore, was not content to keep on coming to Ingram Place without knowing why he did so, why it gave him pleasure to do so. The result startled him. It was not at all satisfactory to his logical mind that the contradiction and frivolity of a silly butterfly should please him, as though these were attributes he approved of. Something must be wrong in his usually


correct organisation. If something was wrong, something must be set right.

He was in town, in his chambers, when this thought came to him. Upon the table lay law books and papers in what might appear to the uninitiated a confused mass. The handsome sofa and many of the chairs were littered with pamphlets, folios, and notes. Through an open door he had a view of his clerk, who sat writing in a confusion worse confounded. But the famous lawyer was neither making notes, nor looking over his briefs, nor consulting references. His work was before him, his elbows on the table, his head on his hands, his keen, stern eye on the page; but his thoughts would only receive that one idea—something was wrong, and had to be set right.

Of course something was wrong, that he, a man of unblemished honour, of principles as rigid as his reputation, should be ensnared in the golden hair of a silly girl, who not only could never comprehend the great purpose of his life, much less help him on with it, but who might actually be accused of a scheming worse than thoughtlessness.

That was what was wrong. Now to set it right.

The stupid, silly heart, so unworthy of his brain, the heart that had so betrayed him, could never become quite empty again. The atmosphere of life had invaded the vacuum, and, as he had no mental exhausting pump, he could only drive it forth by the presence of another body. To forget one whom he should never have thought of, he would think of some one more suitable. He did not want an heiress, he was rich enough; he did not want pedigree, his pride would do for his wife and himself; he only wanted a woman good and true, one to whom



he could confide his time-honoured name without a pang or a doubt, one who would not wean him from his work by petty, foolish, unworthy exactions.

Next day he left town for Ingram Place.

He had found the woman who in simplicity and grandeur realised his high ideal, reached his lofty standard; a woman whose grave young brow told of suffering, whose sweet, clear smile spoke though all unconsciously of a capacity to form and abide by great resolves. A woman who could sacrifice herself, her passions and feelings, to a great principle.

I told you Rohan Blennerhasset was a sensible man who reasoned out his conclusions. His reasoning just now ran thus :

‘I have found a young girl, good and beautiful, who is likely to make me a better wife than anyone I have met, or am likely to meet with. I should be very foolish to lose her without an effort—therefore I shall make the effort. She is worthy my love—therefore I shall love her.’

It was the evening after coming to this decision, that Mr. Blennerhasset stood in the drawing-room at Ingram. Miss Ingram was the first down, and she stood looking (idly, it seemed, yet she was never busier) out into the chilly autumn night. The brilliant light of the drawing-room threw a sort of pitying glare on the heap of dead leaves heaving restlessly, discontentedly about on the marble terrace. Mr. Blennerhasset stood leaning on one end of the mantelpiece, doubtless bent on some abstruse study, though his outer eye appeared to rest on the white skirt visible in the recess, that scarcely moved even when now and then the lady addressed some trite remark to her guest, to be answered by a monosyllable.

Yes, he must surely have been engaged in some abstruse study that blinded him to outward objects, and caused him to forget where he was, for he suddenly spoke, gravely and seriously, as he would never in his sober senses have spoken to that butterfly of fashion, who, if not that, was something worse.

‘She has certainly seen suffering; she has principle of a high order, that, though not born of, is only perfected through storm and tempest.’

Out into the autumn night Miss Ingram looked; far, far beyond the dead leaves, the thinly clad branches; away across the sea to that German village, where Charlie Devereux, perhaps even now, at the head of a war patrol, looked up at the silent stars, and counted the hours until he should look up at those mighty messengers, but not alone, when he would tell to a kindred spirit the rare tidings they brought him. Oh, and she looked far beyond that into a dim future, where she could see no stars, where neither she nor that true, trusting heart that so patiently bided its time could see any stars in the murky, lowering clouds; into a vast desolate waste, whose scant trees bore the livery of a perpetual autumn that would not, could not, hide its dead leaves in the merciful shroud of winter, but must bear its desolation of decay, its perished hopes, its dead leaves, for ever on its bosom. She looked at all this, and then she turned deliberately round and spoke. Though her face was not visible, he knew it was towards him.

‘You have judged rightly this time, Mr. Blennerhasset. Miss L'Estrange has suffered, and has come out of it untainted. You, who know her only from her outward actions, confess her high principle always evident, but I

who know her whole history, who can read every motive, point to every hidden spring, I tell you that it is impossible for you, who have not that knowledge, ever to do her justice. She is of good family and may not be always poor, yet so incapable is she of anything paltry or base, that if destitute of these advantages she would still be a perfect noble woman.'

He had forgotten who was his auditor, and had merely prolonged a conversation he had held with Mrs. Chirrup before the dressing bell sounded, until she answered. When she began he was puzzled at himself for having spoken, when she finished he was puzzled still more.

Alas, alas, what was all this? Was it that this woman who was incapable of love, incapable of principle, was capable of a true friendship?

Surely, in spite of this incomprehensible puzzle, his heart thrilled within him at such testimony from one who knew to the goodness of the woman whose beauty was only the stamp of a perfectly beautiful soul. Surely, surely it did, or it ought to have done, which of course must be the same thing.

Miss L'Estrange came in, looking wondrously gentle and high bred. She smiled gratefully at Mr. Blennerhasset, who had been so kind to her, and went over to Miss Ingram. Beatrice suffered her to put her arms caressingly around her, but oh, the rebellious heart that beat beneath the touch, the rebellious eyes that looked into the timid, wistful face that had such a spell to darken her life. She released herself with an involuntary movement.

'Something troubles you,' Miss L'Estrange whispered.

'No, my dear, I was only thinking how it is that so much is given to one, and so little to another.'

'Ask Mr. Blennerhasset.'

'Shall I tell you what he would say? That it was all a matter of deserving. Well, sometimes I subscribe to that doctrine, but at other times I rebel. And this rebelling is hard work.'

'Why do it, then?' Miss L'Estrange enquired coaxingly.

'You can no more help it than you can help breathing, if it's your nature. You are submissive, but don't be too hard on those who are so foolish as to tear themselves with chains that are tighter than yours.'

Mrs. Chirrup and Lord Ingram were already in the drawing-room. Mr. Blennerhasset offered his arm to Mrs. Chirrup as dinner was announced, Lord Ingram gave his to Lady Devereux, Miss L'Estrange went with Harry Lister, and Miss Ingram followed, alone.

'Oh, if Charlie would only come back even now,' she said passionately, 'it would not be too late. Surely, if it is possible, he will do something after my letter.'

Before the first course had been removed, a servant slipped a foreign paper into her hand. Pushing her plate from her without a word she tore it open. She had bribed the postman to bring her the papers the instant they arrived, whether it was the time or not.

'Kate, Kate, war has broken out!'

They all looked at her. Even in that moment of sudden dismay it seemed strange that she should have addressed herself to Kate. Mrs. Chirrup stretched out her hand for the paper, and Lady Devereux rose from her chair.

‘Not seriously; my boy is not dying?’

‘It doesn’t say,’ and Flossy looked at her with a dull, mechanical stare; ‘but don’t you see, whether he lives or dies his hopes are ruined?’ She did not finish what she knew, that the coast was clear for Rohan Blennerhasset. Mr. Blennerhasset, clever man as he was, mistook her meaning, and in spite of all his good resolutions, he looked pityingly at the pale face.

‘It may not be so bad as that, Miss Ingram; in fact, I feel convinced it is nothing serious. Don’t you know our friend Charlie had always a trick of falling on his feet?’

She scarcely comprehended his words, but she knew that for once there was kindness in the proud eyes. She wondered dreamily whether, if anything very dreadful happened to her, he would be even a little sorry.

‘You see you are unnecessarily frightened,’ he added, glancing over the paper. ‘It is only a trifling engagement that has taken place, and there is hope that in a few months things may be settled peaceably.’

‘Still it is a dreadful thing that there should be any fighting,’ Miss L’Estrange said, in the low, plaintive tone peculiar to her. ‘I am sorry for all the poor people; especially sorry for Mr. Devereux.’

‘I’m not,’ Miss Ingram exclaimed, with savage energy. ‘I envy him.’

‘What a fool I was to be taken in by the manoeuvres of such an accomplished coquette,’ muttered the lawyer, as the passionate exclamation rang in his ears—‘I envy him.’

A few months! Gracious Heaven, in a few months it might be as well for him to stay for ever as to come. And all the while Lady Devereux comforted herself with

the conviction that in a few months it was quite possible Miss L'Estrange, who she admitted would be a very charming wife for anyone but her son, might be married.

CHAPTER XII.

WHY ?

FOR two months Mr. Blennerhasset was a pretty regular frequenter of Ingram Place, and Miss L'Estrange began to feel that something new had come into her life, something that had never been in it before, but that could never again go quite out of it, something that gave her an unutterable sense of peace and security.

It is not strange that, brought up as she had been, she should be slow to recognise or comprehend what this something was. Jenny Joy had loved her, and would always love her, partly because they had been companions in misfortune, had struggled through and out of it together ; but chiefly because her grand, generous nature impelled her to love. Kate no more questioned her boundless affection than does the child the mother's. Miss Ingram had come to her in her beauty and grandeur as an angel might stoop to a poor sinner. It was Miss Ingram's noble heart had induced her to feel such pity, not anything in her she considered. It therefore never struck her that a man whose name was a household word in a nation could single her out for attention ; that one to whom she looked up with awe and wonder should even bestow a

thought on his humble worshipper. Still she was very happy. The fear of her life faded out in the golden haze, and she only saw the objects at hand, exaggerated out of all reality.

Standing by the open window of the library one July day, with the breath of the flowers, with the last faint love-song of the birds wafted on the evening breeze, came the knowledge of what that happiness was. She loved a good man.

She did not know if he would ever love her, if she would ever be anything to him but a stranger; her heart was thrilled with the simple sensation of loving. It might be more correct to say gratitude, but she did not realise then, not till long afterwards, that it was the persistent kindness and marked politeness evinced by Mr. Blennerhasset that had awakened this feeling. No wonder that with this beautiful secret—for it seemed to her a very beautiful thing to worship one so much better, nobler than herself—she should grow very lovely. No wonder that she should prize the sense of peace and rest, so new to her troubled lot, and grudge the thought of losing it.

And all this time Lady Devereux was watching her; why, or for what, she could not tell.

‘She reads me through and through,’ Kate said to Jenny. ‘I shall die if she finds me out. I could not survive the disgrace of it in that house.’

The little dressmaker for the theatre put down the clown’s vest she was bespangling, and stretched out her hands to the girl who in the Thieves’ Latin had always come to her for comfort, who came to her still.

‘Why risk it, acushla? Come to me, Kate. You

know you're as welcome as the sunlight, now and always. Come to me.'

'I can't. I wish I'd never gone there.'

'Why can't you come, dear?'

'I don't know. Something seems to draw me on, just as something drew me there.'

'Who do you see there?'

'Lord Ingram.'

'I don't mean the house people. Now that Mr. Devereux is away, have they no visitors to make the place lively?'

'Very few, except Mr. Blennerhasset. I needn't tell you who he is.'

'Well, to be sure, his name is on every street boy's tongue. There's few doesn't know he's the cleverest lawyer in Ireland, the wittiest of all the followers of the great Dan, and as firm a friend to a repeal of the Union as he was once its bitter enemy. Still that's very little. You, who see him nearly every day, could tell me much.'

'I don't know that I could,' Kate said, playing with the spangles in which the Dublin Grimaldi was to astonish the natives. 'Although I have known him so long, I hardly know much more than you do—that he is a king among his fellow-men, a demigod whose mighty intellect, towering supreme above all others, proclaims his divinity. Ah! if it were you who lived at Ingram, what true portraits, what racy sketches, you would bring me; but, you see, I am no good.'

The Theatre Royal's dressmaker pushed aside the gaudy garments, and planted her two thin elbows on the table, supporting her sharp, pinched chin with her tiny hands, and looked fixedly at her friend, whom she regarded as a

daughter, and who was exactly two years younger than herself.

‘He is so very clever, then? As clever as they say at Donovan’s grocery of a Saturday night?’

‘How can those people understand him? His cleverness is above them. They cannot exaggerate it.’

‘And you like him?’

‘How can I help liking one so much better than myself? Oh, Jenny, he is so grand in his truth, his justice, that he frightens me sometimes.’

‘Then don’t have anything to say to him,’ was Jenny’s sharp rejoinder.

Kate started, but Jenny turned to other topics. When she was again alone, she took up her work and stitched with a will. Her face was very pale; a choking sensation came in her throat till she stopped and gasped for breath; and went on again with her work. The gasps became more frequent; more oppressive grew the hurting at her chest, till, with a long-drawn groan, she dropped her work, and clasped her hands as though physical pain might prove an outlet for this feeling that threatened to suffocate her.

The July sunlight streamed in at her window—poured in in golden showers, though every other house in the street was wrapped in the evening shadows. But she could not see it; her eyes were darkened. She could not be glad and thankful to-day for the twittering of that little bird that beat its wings against the bars in a mad desire to nestle on her shoulder. Deaf and blind to all but her misery, she only heard the echo of the knell that had buried her long ago in utter loneliness—that shut her out from all companionship with her kind.

‘Oh, mother, mother, why was I made different to

everybody else? Why have I the face and form of a witch, and the soul and heart of a woman? Why have I thought of a destiny that comes to every woman, but can never come to me? Kate suffered in her childhood, so did I; but she will love, and be loved, while I must go on growing more lonely every day. Oh, mother, if this is to be my lot, why does my heart cry out for something better? Ah! why didn't I die when I had you to weep for me? Why, why must I go on living, when living is only suffering and rebelling, and suffering more?

She took up her work with a will that could be cruel to herself; but with every stitch came that everlasting 'Why?' that was never answered, that repeated itself over and over, now passionately, fiercely, like the presumptuous questioning of a Lucifer, now plaintively, wailingly, as the moan of crushed life.

Who shall answer that 'Why?' Who shall say why human beings should be gifted with grand impulses, only to have them checked; with great hearts, only to feel their emptiness, to be chilled by the vastness of their lonely chambers? Why should such passionate cravings for affection and fellowship be bestowed on those who, by some peculiarity of lot, are set apart? Is it some sublime irony of Nature on those who would dive into her secrets?

Heaven help those so set apart! If there are compensations in nearly every case, think you they are as satisfying to the poor weak human heart as that which they are instead of? Does the thought of being a little quicker in some particular study, a little further advanced in a favourite science, atone for the ostracism which is not for years, but for a life, which means banishment for aye from the loves and joys of your fellows, which is only removed

when death has released the exile, and given him a citizenship from which none can thrust him out ?

There are those who feel it no wrong to be set apart, souls that look upon the elevation attained as a glorious compensation for the long struggle, the life solitariness ; but they are veterans wearied with the heat of the strife, worn out with the contest with their ostracisers to receive them back into their midst, content to live out their short evening on the calm, silent hills, away from the turmoil and bustle of the city, almost forgetting how once their hopes were centred there, how once they pleaded at the gates for admittance. Or they are young ardent spirits, so proud in their glorious self-sufficiency, so confident in the strength they feel within them, that they are able to fling back scorn for wrong, but whose hour of weakness is yet to come, when the craving for sympathy and fellowship will not be stifled, when the one cry of their hearts will be, ' Oh, that I were like everybody else, that my lot were that of all mankind ! Oh, that I could annihilate every distinctive difference between myself and them, and share with the common herd their mediocrity and its privileges ! '

Jenny had no studies, no absorbing science to be to her father, mother, husband, and child ; she had only a grand, generous nature that would not suffer her to shut herself up within herself, a great, tender heart for others' woes, a wonderful pity for all poor, sick, and afflicted. In her girlhood this had sufficed her. In the proud loneliness to which her companions had tacitly condemned the witch of the Latin, she had seen only the acknowledgment of her superiority, and gloried in it. But now, as the years went by, as she realised to what other women were born, the passionate spirit rebelled against the isolation that was

the result of her singularity, physical and mental ; and her one cry was, ' Why was I made different ?'

This hour will pass. The time will come when either the grand, generous heart will again suffice her, when the joys of others will occupy the place of personal happiness ; or the soul will lie stranded, a hopeless wreck, moaning to the winds and waves of fate a weary, purposeless lament.

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWEEN HER AND HEAVEN.

WHEN THE DARKNESS COMES THE STARS SHINE OUT.

MISS INGRAM'S dressing-room was her pet sanctum. It was there she shut herself up when she desired to be free from the loving eyes of her darling little godmother, or the prying orbs of Cerise. For there were times when to the disturbed mind of this gay young girl even the indifferent glance of her haughty uncle seemed to read her secret.

It was a large airy room, with a deep bay window at the south end that looked on to the lawn. Rich couches and luxurious ottomans were scattered about over a carpet of dark green strewn with clusters of trailing snowdrops.

The door was shut now upon the prying and the loving eyes. No need now to wear the mask of gaiety over a breaking heart ; no need to smile and jest, when groans and sobs for a love lost, a life embittered, a future declared barren, bleak, and desolate, struggled in her throat ; when

tears for the terrible loneliness of the lot she had cut out for herself blinded her eyes.

Yes, cut out for herself. Had not her own hand done it all? Had not her pride, like a great barrier between Rohan Blennerhasset and her true self, prevented him even the chance of guessing the truth she thought he ought to have divined? And who but herself had brought this girl with her peerless beauty, her winning, wistful eyes, where she could not but creep into his heart?

Was there no help for it?

She rose and paced the room. The tears might fall now, the sobs might break forth; there was no one to see or hear. That at least was something, but it was not enough. She must do, as well as watch and weep. She could not and would not sit down patiently while the happiness of her life was taken from her. And yet what course was open to her?

She could dismiss one who was after all a hired companion, whose beauty shone in its full lustre only through her generosity. She could send her away in an hour, she need never return to Ingram; and the probability was that she would be lost to the circle in which Rohan Blennerhasset moved. Yes, she could do that. It was some consolation to feel, to know it. She could, but would she?

'Oh, just Heaven!' she moaned—no child now, but a woman, grand in her capacity for suffering—'I was ready to give her all but this. Titles, lands, position, all the adulation, all the gorgeous enchantment in which the world is so rich for me, even to the noble, handsome, generous lover they destined for me. All, all I was ready

to yield up; only this one thing did I covet for myself. How can I give it up?'

No pacing now. With her face buried in the ottoman she knelt, weeping her hope away.

'And he was so near loving me once. If I had only been wiser, better, of a higher nature, more worthy of him; but I was frivolous, vain, shallow, present enjoyment was my god, and how could he suppose that beneath so frothy a surface lay a great heart that would give up everything, all its little bubbles, for the certainty of a true love? And now he will love the girl who is all noble, who is capable of great resolutions, who is as high, as pure as himself, whom I have not even the merit of having raised into goodness, since she was all good when I found her. Why not, why not? I had the first chance, and I could not avail myself of it; I was weighed and found wanting. Why then should I struggle any longer?'

She rose and crossed her arms with a species of proud composure.

'No, I will not wear my life out in a humiliating struggle for that which is denied me. I will prove, if only to my own heart, that I am capable of one great resolution, of carrying out one high resolve, that even he would approve. He will never know it; but at least I shall have the proud satisfaction of looking him boldly in the face while I tell myself, though I cannot tell him, that he has wronged me, that his judgment was harder than the truth.'

The soft draperies of the open window swayed to and fro before the evening breeze. Standing out distinctly between the sometimes parted folds, seen cloudily, dreamily through their lacy texture, two figures came between her

and Heaven. On a rising ground, face to face with the setting sun, their long black shadows thrown behind them, they stood arm in arm. No one was near them save the giant pines; in solitary relief their figures were portrayed against the sky between that silent watcher and Heaven. Thus they stood, as only lovers and betrothed lovers might stand, happy without fear of rebuke.

She had known it must be so, and yet now when she looked it seemed all so new and strange. Once Rohan Blennerhasset had stood thus with her, words trembling on his lips that she knew why were never spoken. That girl yonder would reach his standard; he had at last found a wife worthy not only of his name, his honour, but of him, and it was well, very well.

Yes, well, very well was it, though a cold faint sickness spread from her heart to her limbs, and she knelt by the window for support, her elbows resting on the sill, her icy fingers supporting her weary head, her heavy eyes looking out at those two figures standing between her and Heaven.

No, not between her and Heaven; only between her and a very little part of it. She raised her eyes from the brow of that western hill, raised them to the vast expanse of blue sky over which the grey twilight was creeping. All that illimitable firmament was left to her, but it was, oh, so dark, so chill. The glory of the setting sun was gone; it had departed behind that western hill. She looked up into the grey canopy that had lost its clear blue tint, and she knew that no mortal was great enough to stand between her and it.

The figures sauntered slowly away, and nothing now was between her and Heaven; it was all left her now, but oh, how dark!

Darker, mistier, grew the twilight as the girl knelt there, shrouded in the fleecy drapery, unconscious of the cold night air. Darker, colder, greyer grew that Heaven that was left to her.

A wordless thought that was half a prayer, half a rebellion, went up against her destiny.

‘Is this to be my life—cold, grey, dark duty, unbroken by a ray of gladness?’

Out from the misty twilight came a shimmering, beautiful thing. Deeper, denser grew the darkness; clearer, purer, larger, brighter burned the evening star. Beaming into that cold desolate heart in its divine beauty, it came with its message of peace and hope, its wondrous story of light in darkness. Glittering with marvellous splendour as all around grew invisible, it seemed to have absorbed all the beauty of the night into its brilliancy, to shower it down on that darkened spirit. The passionate tears fell like rain, and warmed her back to life.

‘Courage, courage, poor heart,’ she whispered; ‘your lot may be dreary, but an all-wise Deity will enthrone on its horizon some stars of hope.’

What though the glories of your day be departed, your sun sunk in oblivion? When the darkness comes, the stars will shine out. When the world is still, and Nature at rest, you will join in truer unison in the great chorus of the universe, ‘God over all.’

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHOLE WORLD BEFORE HER.

It came at length. The suspicions of Lady Devereux took shape and form, and Kate knew that it was so. Careful as she was to guard her secret, Miss Ingram never suspected this. She forgot how closely her interests were interwoven with those of her stately aunt, and would as soon have connected her with state intrigues as with any domestic plotting.

Strangely mingled with the thought of the rest and security she would have as Rohan Blennerhasset's wife, there came to Kate a curious sense of unreality, through whose mist loomed the majestic shape of Charlie Devereux's mother. Never had the promise she had given to this man, on whose strength she leaned with implicit confidence, seemed so dim, so far away, as now, when Lady Devereux's waiting woman stood at her door.

'Miss L'Estrange, my lady asks if you'll be good enough to step into her dressing-room. She won't keep you a minute, miss.'

The household had retired, Miss L'Estrange and Miss Ingram having just said good night. Kate rose mechanically and followed the woman. What did Lady Devereux want with her to-night? Was it to tell her that she, the daughter of a thief, she, a thief herself, had no place in that household, no name by which she could be called that would not sully the speaker's lips, that she must wander forth again, homeless, nameless, through the wide, wide

world, that is such a cruel world to those who do not know how to trample upon it, to bring forth its sweetness and render its stinging sneers, its virulent animosities, its biting sarcasms, harmless as their great prototype, the nettle?

Lady Devereux's dressing-room was a spacious, luxurious apartment. The fauteuils and couches were of crimson and gold, the carpet of velvet pile. Standing alone in white splendour was the dressing-table, with its tall mirror and dazzling profusion of ornaments doubled in the pier glass opposite.

Lady Devereux sat on a low sofa, drawn near the dressing-table. Her superb dress of violet velvet suited her well, and she looked magnificently, royally handsome, as she rose to receive Miss L'Estrange.

'You will pardon me I trust for trespassing on your time, Miss L'Estrange,' she said, with the graciousness which was inseparable from her, and which could not therefore be reserved for the exclusive use of those of her own rank, 'especially when I tell you that it is in the hope of resolving a doubt that has troubled me.'

Kate answered her faintly that she was at her service, and sat down on the low chair indicated, where, without rude staring, Lady Devereux could detect every expression on her face by simply looking in either mirror.

'Poor child!' she murmured to herself, 'she has suffered, I see that, and I must pain her more perhaps. I cannot help it; Beatrice is my sister's child, she will be my son's wife. She must be guarded from imposition, at whatever risk.'

'You were doubtless a little startled the night Lord Ingram arrived here. I mean to have apologised to you

before this. Still his sad story is excuse enough. Perhaps you have heard it ?'

Kate didn't know, she might have, but it didn't matter. The cruel suspicion that had fastened on Lady Devereux began to deepen.

'She has heard the common story, I see that; her exclamations that night betrayed her. Why does she affect to deny it now? Can it be that she has formed the idea of taking advantage of Ingram's credulity, and trying to pass herself off as the wretched girl he called his daughter in a moment of frenzy? Well, she shall hear the story my way.'

'Yes, I should like you to know the whole of the story, Miss L'Estrange,' and the eagle eyes looked piercingly into the face in the mirror. 'You know, doubtless, that Lord Ingram lost his little daughter. Perhaps you know too that a little more than three years ago a man of the lowest stamp declared his daughter, a girl convicted of theft, to be Kate Ingram.'

Miss L'Estrange was white and rigid. She neither moved nor spoke, and Lady Devereux went on, not looking at the mirror now, but at the face before her.

'Lord Ingram at the time gave credence to this report, though it overwhelmed him with shame in his own eyes, and degraded him in the sight of the world. You know that, I daresay; it was widely enough spread at the time.'

Miss L'Estrange bent her head, but the movement seemed to give her pain.

'But perhaps you do not know what we know, Miss L'Estrange, that the man who made that assertion was a convict, and still more, an impudent impostor.'

She waited for an answer, but what could Kate say?

The man so stigmatised was her father, and she could not say a word in his defence. The long lashes drooped over the colourless cheeks, her hands lay listlessly on her lap, and Lady Devereux went on eagerly.

‘Don’t you understand? We can prove it was an imposture. You don’t believe me?’

Kate bent her head, but she could not speak to accuse her father. There were enough to condemn him.

‘Not only that, but we have partly traced the girl so infamously put forward. What do you think? She was placed at a school to be educated for the position she was to claim. Ere long we shall have secured her, and that is all that is needed to bring her to justice.’

‘God help her, madam, let her rest. What should you want with one so miserable? I believe what you say—that the attempt you speak of was an imposture.’

‘Ah! you believe that?’

‘I know it; it was an imposture from beginning to end. The girl was not Lord Ingram’s daughter.’

‘And you?’ was the involuntary question, ‘who are you? I have a right to know. Of course I do not for a moment suspect you of wishing to take advantage of his fatuitous idea that you were like his daughter, but still you have surrounded yourself with mystery and it preys upon his mind. I am in a measure the guardian of his interests, and I can see that he is perpetually revolving your possible parentage. He grows ill and weak, but if he knew exactly whose child you were, he could no longer indulge hurtful fancies.’

Miss L’Estrange turned towards her with inexpressibly mournful dignity.

‘Be easy, madam,’ she said, with the unconscious

majesty of supreme sorrow ; ' I am not Lord Ingram's daughter, I am not, indeed, nor would I be if I could, since it would only bring him additional sorrow instead of the comfort I would long to bestow on one who, like myself, has suffered much. That is all you have a right to know ; beyond that it cannot matter to you who or what I am.'

The lady's fascinated gaze lingered on the face that had attracted her so strangely. Miss L'Estrange rose.

' Your ladyship has nothing further with me ? '

' Yes, I have. Miss L'Estrange, I have a niece who is very dear to me. She is the child of my favourite sister, she will be my son's wife. You will not blame me that I seek to secure her future by fully proving the fallacy of all claims that might injure hers. That can only be done by tracking the girl put forward three years ago. But there is still another motive that incites me to the search. I never had much love for Lord Ingram, he was only my brother-in-law for two short years, and with the death of my sister's child ceased all relationship between us. But now, in his affliction, I remember that the daughter he mourns was my niece. And, Miss L'Estrange, he mourns not so much that daughter dead as the daughter disgraced. Could we but restore to him the hope that his child died in the innocency of childhood, not only would he be restored to comparative happiness, for you see his pride is a stronger, more real thing than his imaginary affection for a ragged stranger, but the blot would be forever removed from a noble house. Was I wrong when I imagined you could aid me to do this ? '

Keenly did those eagle eyes watch the girl's face. What did they see there ? Only a dark grey shadow creeping over its beauty, chilling its brightness. Oh, it

was hard, so hard, to be told that the happiness of another depended on her relinquishing that which she had so lately grasped, that was so inexpressibly grateful to her weary, weary heart.

He whom she was required to relieve was an innocent sufferer, true, but was not she the same? A hard feeling came into her heart as she looked into the eyes that so steadfastly regarded her. Plaintive, unutterably mournful, became the pleading look, but she could see no sign of relenting in the haughty face, and her own became hard again.

‘She will hunt me down; she will pardon my offence only when I have made public reparation. No, I cannot tell her who I am, and ask her to keep my secret. She is mad to ask me, but she does not know that I am Mr. Blennerhasset’s promised wife. I cannot go forth of my own accord, and doom myself to the misery and degradation of my old life; I cannot, for the sake of healing the pride of an aristocratic family, speak the word that must hurl me from the respectability so hardly won back to my original wretchedness.’

These thoughts passed through her mind with painful rapidity; not one after another, but altogether they seemed to come.

‘How? What do you require of me?’ she asked.

‘Can you give me no information? The truth once proved, the girl shall be bountifully provided for. The wide world will be still open to her.’

She smiled bitterly, oh, how bitterly, at the prospect held out. The wide world would be open to her. Oh, yes, the wide, cruel, heartless world would be open to her. The great world of strangers would be before her,

strangers to whom, if they became her friends after years of patient struggle with their suspicion, a word, a look, a reference might betray her secret. No, she could not face that world. The home she possessed in a good man's heart might be taken from her, but it required more moral courage than she was possessed of to give it up.

'You deceive yourself, madam. I can give you no information.'

'None? Even though I tell you ample reparation will be made for any unpleasantness the girl may suffer. Think, pray think. Something may occur to you.'

'Nothing,' Miss L'Estrange said mechanically.

A look of intense disappointment came over the face of the lady, and her penetrating gaze faltered. What was this girl plotting? What did she intend to do?

'Pardon me, then, for having troubled you unnecessarily,' she said, in her haughtiest, coldest tones. 'I see I must prosecute my search alone.'

Kate bent her head in a dreary, weary fashion, and as the lady relapsed into moody meditation, she rose.

'Ah, you are tired, no doubt. I will detain you no longer. Good night, Miss L'Estrange.'

CHAPTER XV.

LEARNING TO BE STRONG.

JENNY no longer nodded to the twittering canary. She never raised her head from her work, but stitched as

though she would work her pain away. It is a good specific, this fierce, hard work, this unremitting labour. It kills where it does not cure. She did not look up even when a knock drew from her a churlish 'come in,' but the rustle of a dress aroused her.

'Miss Ingram! It's not yourself I thought to see.'

There was something in the face of her visitor that drew her out from her miserable self.

'Not there, bring your chair here where I can touch you.'

'I'll interrupt you at your work, Jenny,' Miss Ingram said, in a mechanical way.

'No, no, my dear, I like you near me.'

Miss Ingram sat down, and rested her head on her hand in a weary fashion, very unusual to her.

'There's nothing bad happened?'

'No, nothing but good; but somehow I wanted to come and sit with you a while. It makes me strong, Jenny, it makes me strong.'

Two thin brown hands drew a white one and chafed it with their loving palms. Something in the childish caress comforted Miss Ingram. So they sat for awhile, the elf and the heiress.

'When did Kate come last?'

'The day before yesterday.'

'Ah! Then she couldn't have told you all—though she may some—that Mr. Blennerhasset loves her.'

'No, she couldn't tell me that,' said Jenny sharply, 'because it wouldn't be true.'

'It is true. He has proposed, and they are engaged, since last night.'

'I'm sorry to hear it.'

Miss Ingram winced.

'Yes, I'm sorry to hear it,' and the small creature leant forward to put her arm round the slender neck, 'and I'll tell you why, achora. Its not that he's a hard, selfish man, he is, that'll be always ferreting out this thing and that thing. He's not the sort of man a girl ought to love, but it's worse than that. I tell you he doesn't love *her*.'

'You mustn't think of him like that now, Jenny.'

'Oh, this war—this cruel war!'

This had been the burden of Miss Ingram's plaint; now when spoken by other lips it was more than she could bear.

'Poor Charlie!' she said. 'Poor Charlie! what will he do?'

'Why didn't he speak before he went?'

'He said it would have been unjust. Besides, you know, Jenny, if she liked Mr. Blennerhasset she wouldn't have listened to Charlie.'

'Stuff and rubbish. If Mr. Devereux had only been in time, she'd never have given a thought to Mr. Blennerhasset.'

'But remember it's too late to say anything now, Jenny. They are pledged—a noble, honourable man to a good, beautiful girl. No one must now put between them.'

'You are right, dear,' said the elf softly.

'And you will learn to like him for Kate's sake?'

'I will try, my dear.'

There was a long, long silence, then Miss Ingram rose to go. She saw in the loving, pitying face that her secret was read.

'You see, my dear,' she said, in answer to the wistful

look, 'our lot has more in common than people would imagine.'

From that day there was a bond of sympathy between those two, apparently separated by insuperable barriers, and seldom a day came that did not bring Miss Ingram to learn how to bear her life-loneliness from the only one who could by right of an equally noble nature understand hers, whose loneliness alone equalled hers.

The sharp frost encrusted the earth when Charlie Devereux returned. The autumn had buried her dead, the fallen leaves were out of sight, only the bare trees, like desolate homesteads, spread out their leafless branches as if praying for a still greater ruin that should leave no monument of the destruction wrought. Miss Ingram stood at the drawing-room window looking out for her cousin. He was not expected till six o'clock at the sharpest calculation, and Lady Devereux was taking her afternoon nap in company with Mrs. Chirrup, the two ladies nodding over the fire in the dressing-room, making believe that they were chatting. It was only three o'clock now, yet still Miss Ingram stood there watching, with a vague idea that this daring, reckless cousin would outstrip probabilities to hurry home to his life's disappointment.

A horse's hoofs crunching the gravel walk, and those ladies who were not sleeping, only dozing and chatting, never heard it. Lord Ingram looked out from his study, and Mr. Blennerhasset left his heap of papers on the library table to go to the window. Both were too late; the horseman had already passed to the other side of the house. Miss Ingram flung the glass door open wide.

'Charlie!'

'Flossy!'

He looked so handsome, so manly, so happy, her heart failed her; the smile she had called up to greet him faded away.

‘They none of them expected you till evening, but something told me you would come just a little sooner than was possible, and I determined to have you all to myself for a little.’

The servant riding up took away the young officer’s horse, and the cousins entered the drawing-room.

‘How are they all, Flossy? You are prettier than ever. Is my mother here?’

‘Yes, she came to meet you here last week. She was up at her own place for a few months.’

‘And my fairy aunt?’

‘All well, Charlie.’

‘And Miss L’Estrange?’

She looked up at him quietly and gravely. A sudden chill came to the gallant heart of the young soldier as he bent over his cousin.

‘I would have written the news, but it only happened a few days ago, and you could not have got the letter.’

‘What?’ he whispered.

‘She is engaged.’

He did not speak; the ruddy firelight shone on the noble face so strong, so brave. By-and-by he looked down and asked, in low hushed tones as if speaking of the dead,

‘Who to?’

‘Mr. Blennerhasset.’

The pale sweet face never changed, the soft sad voice never faltered, but he knew it all now. Both desolate, both deserted, companions in sorrow. He put his arm round his cousin, and the bright young head drooped on

his shoulder. A feeling that she was not all alone, that others suffered beside herself, came to her as Charlie's sympathy looked out of the clear true eyes, straight from the boyish, generous heart that could feel a grief besides his own. A comforting sense of protection crept over her.

Mr. Blennerhasset came round by the terrace to welcome Charlie; he looked in at the glass door. A black frown was on his stern face, but surely it could not have been for what he saw there. He was engaged to a young and lovely girl, who fulfilled his idea of what a woman should be. What could it be to him that another woman leant on Charlie Devereux's arm, and bent her head on a friendly shoulder as though comforted by the support?

This picture was clear and distinct before him, even when the sound of voices laughing and talking apprised him that all the household had heard the news and were trooping into the drawing-room, and that he might enter without fear of disturbing the cousins. It blurred and blotted the vision of the pale, handsome, soldierly face that looked into his with a peculiar questioning glance. It prevented him taking particular note of the sudden gravity that had settled in the young eyes, though it haunted him somehow, dimly, indistinctly, like a phantom that he had himself evoked but could not grasp.

They stood round him laughing and talking, Lady Devereux, Mrs. Chirrup, even Lord Ingram joining in the shower of questions. Suddenly another was added to the group, another voice swelled the chorus of welcome, none the less richly that its tones were low and sweet.

'I am glad to see you back safe, Mr. Devereux.'

Brave Charlie! He never flinched as he looked into the sweet smiling face, as he touched the small soft hand, as

he returned the kindly greeting, yet there was that in his face that partially roused Mr. Blennerhasset from the contemplation of the picture still present to him, that made Miss Ingram's heart ache, that pained Kate she could not tell why.

'Oh, Charlie, poor Charlie!' moaned Miss Ingram to herself, 'I suffer, but so do you; and you too are already learning to be strong—learning the lesson that so many have to learn to save themselves from the galling pity of the world, from utter self-abasement—to smile even while the wolf is gnawing your vitals, and only draw the cloak tighter.'

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT SUCCESS MR. BLENNERHASSET HAD.

At the south of the park, the low fir-topped hill stretched lovingly down to the very beach, only a broad road separating the verdant slope from the wet shingle. It was a favourite haunt of Miss Ingram's, and there she sat, watching the decline of the day god. Miss L'Estrange was with her, and at times they both glanced over the road that wound away to the south, and was lost to view beside some suddenly curving cliffs.

The chill November wind rushed up from the sea, but it did not drive the watchers from their post; it only made them pace at a quicker rate from end to end, now in the shadow of the firs, now in the cold wintry sunlight that gleamed at them over the broad, blustering Atlantic.

‘Kate,’ said Miss Ingram, breaking a long silence, ‘do you know on what Mr. Blennerhasset has been employed this week?’

‘I don’t know,’ Kate said. Even as she spoke her cheek grew paler, the dark circles deepened round her eyes with a nameless fear.

‘I wonder is it anything for my aunt Devereux.’

‘Why do you fancy that, Beatrice?’

‘Well, I saw them talking together just before he left. Still, what could Aunt Beavoin want Mr. Blennerhasset to do for her?’

Miss L’Estrange stopped in her walk, and pressed her hand to her side.

‘What is the matter, Kate?’

‘The pain, the pain. I knew it was coming.’

‘What, my dear?’ and Miss Ingram passed her arm round the slender figure swaying in the wind.

‘Lady Devereux suspects who I am.’

‘And you think——’

‘She has sent him to follow up the scent.’

‘How provoking! Spoil our plans a little, this meddling.’

‘I must go away,’ said the girl, with a strangely earnest expression. ‘You, who are so good to me, always so good, you will help me, will you not?’

‘Go away?’ and for the first time a startled look came into Miss Ingram’s eyes. ‘What should you do that for?’

‘I must. They will find me out, and if I am here to see it I shall die.’

‘You will do no such thing. You will be a brave, good girl, as you always were. You will stay quietly

and make no sign; you will promise that, if they detect the truth, going away will be the last thing you will think of until you have come to me to set you right before them all. Promise me this.'

'But——'

'There is Mr. Blennerhasset.'

'How do you know?' Kate asked, looking at the speck in the far distance.

'Ah, my dear, I have keen sight. I am going in to rest for a while, but not before you promise me, Kate.'

'I do. Oh, I wish I was strong like you.'

'Like me? Ah! Kate, what little strength I have I got from you and Jenny. It was your patient endurance, her unflinching courage, that nerved me on. I cannot tell what I should have been if I had not known you.'

She wrapped her jacket across her chest, and ran down the side of the hill to the park. There was something very unlike the despondency that had of late overtaken her in her firm elastic step.

'I must see Balfe at once,' she murmured to herself. 'If they do find it out it is not my fault, and I shall tell him so.'

Mr. Blennerhasset was near enough to the hill now, and as he perceived Miss L'Estrange he pulled in his horse to wait for her. She came down the slope to meet him, not bounding over rocks, or flying recklessly through bushes, with torn skirts and tangled hair floating in the wind, as would Miss Ingram to a dead certainty, but soberly and quietly, with an unconsciously stately grace peculiar to her, as was befitting Rohan Blennerhasset's wife to do,

‘I have been away a long time,’ he said, as he dismounted and walked by her side.

‘Yes, it has seemed a long week,’ she answered, with perfect truth. ‘Have you been successful?’

The question did not strike him as strange. Lady Devereux had doubtless mentioned the matter. He could not suspect his companion of seeking to gain information surreptitiously. Was it not for her integrity above all things, her blameless demeanour, that he had chosen her as the most fitting person to bear his name and rule his household? What was her beauty to him? What were her sweet low-toned words? He had neither eyes nor ears for the one or the other. He knew that in spite of the mighty victory his reason had gained over the traitorous heart that would have betrayed him to be the sport of a butterfly, a victory that the days as they rolled by must surely go to perfect, he should never have eyes or ears for another woman’s beauty or melody. He never deceived himself so far as to imagine that the purely outlined patrician face beside him was beautiful to him, but he did not on that account scruple to make it his own. It never occurred to him to deceive her any more than himself, yet he did not the less do so, for as it did not occur to him to say bluntly, ‘I do not love you, but it suits me to marry you; my reason approves of it,’ he very naturally allowed her to suppose—even while expatiating to himself on the value of a union founded solely on reason,—that he did care for her very much indeed, and merited not only her warmest gratitude, but the strong, deep love of her woman’s heart in return. And this was the man who was inflexibly just, merciless to deceit above all things.

‘Much more so than I have any wish to be,’ he said gravely.

‘How do you mean?’

‘I do not wish to have secrets about nothing—but in business——’

‘You may tell me,’ she said desperately. ‘Lady Devereux would not have mentioned it to me if she had wished to keep it secret.’

‘Oh, of course not. I have traced the girl as far as the April of last year. The rest I should have discovered, had not Lady Devereux telegraphed for me.’

‘Why did she do that?’

‘I suppose she is impatient.’

‘Don’t you think that she is very cruel?’ and Kate spoke in a hard set voice. ‘This lady so rich, so happy, with all the pride of life gathered about her, why can she not let this poor wretched girl rest in the obscurity she has been permitted by a Heaven more merciful than its creatures to enwrap herself, her sorrows, her cruel memories in? Why must she, the heiress of the world’s grandest heritage, a spotless name, seek to drag forth to punishment, to public disgrace, one who in sinning also suffered?’

‘You speak like a woman,’ he said, and a lofty smile, evincing his supreme contempt for the sex, grew softer as he added, ‘and like a good, gentle one. But justice is not to be tampered with; those who sin must suffer.’

‘Yes, yes, those who sin must suffer; it is inevitable. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. But may it not be sometimes that the punishment exceeds the offence? Does it not sometimes happen that our fellow-creatures make our burdens heavier than they need be? Would you be the one to crush down the staggering wayfarer?’

‘You take too morbid a view of the matter. I must

confess I had not suspected you of so much imaginativeness. But you forget that those who are burdened in general bring it on themselves, and you could not expect honest men to take up the cross of the thief, self-sacrificing, self-denying people to don the rags of the prodigal spendthrift that the latter may revel in purple and fine linen.'

'No, no,' she said recklessly, 'but they might spare them a little pity.'

'I don't know. I don't know what good that does, except to create a mawkish sentimentalism, a habit of elevating all who lay claim to the honour by an extra amount of folly or crime into heroes of misfortune, and of according the coldest indifference to those commonplace individuals who strive to be well-doers. No, I don't think Lady Devereux cruel, but I think her very foolish.'

'Why?'

'Well—she has a niece. What is the good of raking up old stories unless one has a thorough chance of disproving them? Lady Devereux imagines that if she can only lay her hand on the girl she will be able to prove the whole thing false. But if instead of that she should merely bring to light that it was her own niece who three years ago stood in a dock to answer guilty to a charge of theft—or she might discover worse than that—I really believe that Lord Ingram would never survive the double disgrace, while Miss Ingram, who, of course, is immeasurably dearer to her aunt than that poor little outcast, would be disinherited after——'

'But you speak of impossibilities,' Kate said, still speaking in a metallic, monotonous tone. 'Lord Ingram could not be subjected to such disgrace; the girl was not his daughter.'

‘I would give a thousand pounds out of my hand to be sure of that.’

Her face grew a deadlier white; her head sank lower.

‘And if I know anything of human nature, Lord Ingram would give twenty. It would be a terrible thing for him, the restoration of such a daughter.’

‘Why do you not ask Lady Devereux to desist?’

‘How could I interfere between Justice and her ends?’ and he crossed his arms with a stern gloom she remembered long afterwards. ‘If these broad lands are the heritage of a miserable beggar, who, though she had all these appanages of rank and wealth, could never by any possibility be anything but a Pariah, a living blot on an outraged society, to whom the truest kindness would be shown by letting her rest in obscurity; and though to give it to such an one is to deprive a high-bred lady of what has become the very breath of life to her, of what she is fitted to grasp, of that for which she has dared so much; yet who am I that I should step between that beggar and her rights? If it is her right it is she, not Miss Ingram, who must have it. No power could take it from that girl, reared in vice, to give it to the tenderly-nurtured lady, and if such could be done, I would not raise my finger towards it. Beggar, thief, and all, what is hers she must have.’

He spoke with exceeding bitterness, with a gloomy remorse for his own weakness that blinded him to the pale white face beside him, that drowned with its nearer agony the wail of pain that sounded in the voice floating by him, surging in his ears, reaching his brain but never touching his heart.

‘What grounds have you for thinking so positively that that girl was his daughter?’

'Lord Ingram has spoken to me as perhaps he spoke to no one else, and from what he has told me there rests no doubt on my mind that the story told in a court three years ago was true. The facts and my opinion I gave Lady Devereux, but I can see she passes over both. Her idea is that by a simple birth-mark she can confound a very clever imposture, while in all probability she will only bring to light a very bitter truth.'

'Mr. Blennerhasset, you are very clever, you are accustomed to sift evidence; have you sifted carefully all pertaining to this case?'

'Oh, yes, I have separated facts from probabilities.'

'And there remains no doubt upon your mind?'

'No doubt.'

Miss Ingram stood at the great hall door to welcome them. The sun had set long ago, the short winter twilight was passing rapidly, the building was enwrapped in shadows that took shape and form in the deep recesses, the manifold corners, of the beautiful old pile, that were densest and blackest under the great portico. There was no sunlight to light up the dark purple robe Miss Ingram wore, no day-star glory to bring out the living gold of her tresses, the living light of her eyes. Sombre and heavy fell the folds of rich drapery round the fragile childish form, pale and anxious looked out the young face from the soft fair frame, round which all was gloom and mysterious darkness.

'Welcome back, Mr. Blennerhasset.'

Like a flash of lightning the smile irradiated her face and lighted up her eyes. Even as she spoke the lamps were lighted in porch and hall, the warm rich light

streamed down on hair and face and dress, the full bright colour flowed out in responsive harmony.

Was she, the heiress of Ingram, this fair high-bred girl, who moved and looked like a princess treading her own palace halls, welcoming to her home the guests of Ingram? If she was not why she ought to be, was Kate's conclusion, as she stepped out of cold and darkness into light and warmth. If she was not, where would they find one so fit? Not in the person of an *élève* from the Thieves' Latin, surely?

'Come, Kate, it is time to dress. Mr. Blennerhasset, I leave you *sans cérémonie*. I hope your mission has been as great a success as it deserves, for I know nothing but business has kept you from us so long.'

She looked wonderfully handsome as she paused at the foot of the staircase to look up in his face with a shadow of her old sauciness, but the tacit defiance did not raise his anger now. She had plotted and planned for nothing, she had sold herself for naught, and the end must soon come. He could not help it, perhaps he would not if he could, but somehow just for that once in his life a great pity looked out of his eyes at the girl who had struggled so bravely in a bad cause. She never forgot that look, though her only answer to it now was—

'You must tell me all about it this evening. Please, will you promise?'

'I am afraid not.'

'Why?'

'You might not like to hear.'

'I would, were it as dry as dust.'

'There are some things not dry as dust that one is not always equal to hearing.'

'I am equal to anything—always excepting a stern look from my lord on behalf of cold soup, so I spare you for the present. Come, Kate.'

Her merry, reckless laugh, the peculiar meaning she had given to the simple words she spoke, rang in his ears as she ran up the stairs, half dragging her friend with her.

'We're very late,' she whispered rapidly, 'but tell me quickly, has he discovered anything?'

'Part, not all.'

'They can't get over the last year?'

'No.'

'That's all right. You haven't had a quarrel, my dear?'

'Oh, no.'

'What's wrong, then?'


'Nothing, only myself; only me. I'm all wrong, all wrong from beginning to end, whichever way you take me.'

CHAPTER XVII.

ONLY A COWARD.

THE fire burnt fitfully on the figure of Miss Ingram's companion as she crouched on the hearthrug. Her door was locked. There was no light in the apartment, save the flicker of the coal, to witness the old shadow of her childhood stealing over the youth that had so lately come to her.

Only remember how sad, how very sad, her life had been, and you will understand how precious this refuge had become; what a staff of strength to lean upon the



strength of a friend so true, so brave as Miss Ingram had been. You will comprehend that from this sheltered haven the darkness outside looked blacker, the cruel winds sounded more pitiless. Yet out into the black darkness, into the pitiless tempest, she must wander again.

Over and over rang in her ears, 'He will never survive the disgrace.' Could she remain to bring deadlier shame on that poor old man to whom the loving heart within her turned? She must go, not because she feared that she would be branded as an impostor, but because she began to have a terrible dread that she might indeed be Lord Ingram's daughter.

It was a horrible thought that all the sin and sorrow of her life must be shared by that grey-haired man whom she would have died to comfort; that there would be no escape for him from the disgrace of his daughter.

And Miss Ingram, she to whom all the peace and comfort of the last three years was owing, she would be disinherited, thrust out from her place by one who could never fill it, to whom the title of Baroness Ingram would be but the crowning baseness of her life.

How good, oh, how good she had always been, this young girl who had come to the ragged, unkempt outcast in the Dublin jail like an angel of mercy, who had never from that hour wearied in her labour, never faltered in the grand scheme she had laid out for herself.

Clearly enough the girl saw now what that scheme was, and a faint, mournful smile crossed her face as she thought how she would defeat it. What though that noble heart had planned and nearly executed a resolve by which the outcast should be fitted for her station, made capable of winning a father's pride; should it be permitted

to be finished when its accomplishment would mean the complete sacrifice of the planner.² No, no. She had been a poor coward all her life, but she would save these two people from herself.

And how about Rohan Blennerhasset?³

Ah! the poor weak heart failed her here. She clasped her hands together over her lap as she crouched on the rug and looked into the flickering fire, and pictured herself lonely, desolate, with no chance of ever again winning a good man's love. The clock struck one, and still she sat there, helpless, weak.

Two o'clock, and still she crouched there. She had always been a coward, a poor miserable coward, and she could not face bravely the desolation before her.

Again and again rang in her ears, 'He will never survive the disgrace.' Like a flash came the recollection of Rohan Blennerhasset's face as he uttered the words, the clear, merciless brow, the unsoftened mouth. He, too, was a proud man, proud of his integrity, his spotless fame, as Lord Ingram of his name, ay, and with as rampant a pride. What would it be to him if a breach of dishonour touched his wife?

The thought had not come to her before. She had suffered herself to bask in his condescending kindness, to worship him with the incense of an immensely grateful nature, never imagining that she could wrong him thereby. But she saw it all now; she saw that for his sake, too, she must hide in some far-off corner.

He would regret her a little perhaps, he would think kindly, pitifully of her; and she—nothing in the world, not all the deep waters that might roll over her soul, could



deprive her of the memory of that time when he had loved her.

Her resolution was taken. Mr. Blennerhasset was to leave Ingram next day. She would see him for the last time; she would have another look at that poor old man, whose mournful pride broke her heart. Utterly exhausted, she crept into bed, wondering drearily when she might be able to do so again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER THREE YEARS A SIGN.

‘UNCLE, for three years I have obeyed you. I have never spoken to you of my cousin.’

‘Your cousin!’ repeated Lord Ingram, stupefied, leaning over his table to look into the face of his niece, who sat on a low ottoman very near him, so near that she could touch his hand by stretching out her own.

‘Yes, uncle, my cousin. I cannot suppose you have not thought of her all that time. It is not your heart that is so hard; it is only your pride.’

‘Why should I think of her?’ he asked tremulously.

‘Because your heart is craving for a daughter’s love, and will not be satisfied without. Because, whatever she may have been, she is still your daughter. She has a claim upon you that no resolve of yours can do away with, and you cannot reconcile yourself to abandon her any longer to the poverty of a heartless world.’

'Why do you come and tempt me? Have I not suffered enough?'

'And has not she suffered all this time? Oh, uncle Ralph, think of her thrust out.'

'I did not thrust her out.'

'But you let her go. See what a great noble soul she had, this cousin of mine. See how she shut herself out from you, and from all her former ties, that you might be spared. Why do you not seek her, that she may be comforted from all her sorrows, that she may comfort you?'

His eyes were fixed mechanically on the young girl opposite; he felt his pride beginning to melt, he stretched out his hand to take hers.

'You are a good girl; a good brave girl. You are my daughter. I want no other.'

She came nearer, kneeling beside him.

'No, uncle Ralph, I am not your daughter. You can never love me as you loved that wee baby long ago, that prattling thing whose voice lingers in your ears to-day, but who buffets even now with the loneliness of her life.'

He trembled, and would have pushed her back, but she kept her ground. He dared not think of that baby face pinched and wan, of that dimpled arm bare and thin, or his pride would melt like a snow-wreath before the sun.

'Have you thought of that, uncle Ralph? Have you thought of that baby chatterer asking in vain for bread?'

'Go away, go away. Have I not suffered enough?'

'Ah! You have struggled a long time; but after three years you will surely acknowledge that a father's love is stronger than a man's pride?'

He made no answer, except to wave his hand as if to motion her away.

‘He will surely relent to himself,’ she thought as she went out. A sound as of the fall of a heavy body startled her. She stood still a moment, then with a terrible fear re-opened the door. On the ground, huddled up between chair and table, was Lord Ingram, senseless.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT ROHAN BLENNERHASSET AND CHARLIE DEVEREUX SAW
ON TUESDAY NIGHT.

‘I WANT to see you to-night. Be on the lawn at the east end at twelve.’

That was all, written on a scrap of newspaper skirting, but well, oh, very well, Miss Ingram’s companion knew who was the writer.

Bright as on that night when the Ingram plate basket had been despoiled shone the inquisitive moonlight. To go round the house on such a night would be to place herself full in view of whoever might be at the windows, and yet Balfe was not one to be denied.

Lady Devereux’s apartments were on the ground floor, her ladyship having a thorough dislike to stairs. Her bedroom and dressing-room both opened on to the eastern terrace, and the latter room was accessible from the smaller drawing-room. Just at the dressing-room window a great tree cast its dense shade, and larches thickly planted

formed almost a line of protection from the house to a small grove. Once under the shelter of the little wood it would be easy to escape detection.

Everything was quiet generally at twelve, but to-night it was past one before Miss L'Estrange ventured to Lady Devereux's dressing-room. Not a sound came from the bedroom beyond, but through the open door streamed the pale light of a night lamp. She had forgotten that Lady Devereux was a victim to neuralgia, and frequently kept a light burning that she might be able to get the remedies when the pain became too violent. Paralysed she stood in the doorway between the dressing-room and drawing-room, her figure distinctly thrown out by the light from the room beyond. Standing thus she heard steps, voices on the terrace; the curtains of the glass doors were drawn back, and she suddenly remembered that she must be visible to anyone outside the drawing-room. With a sudden spasm of fear she closed the door behind her, and not daring to remain in the dressing-room, ventured across to the door, which, unlike those of the drawing-room, was shuttered and barred. Opening it with trembling hands, she found herself face to face with Balfe.

Yes, there on the terrace, where the moonlight might reveal him to any passer-by. The shock of the discovery took away her breath, and she stood, powerless to move or speak, until the fragrant perfume of cigars was wafted to her by the night wind. Balfe had no cigar. Nearer, nearer came the steps, the voices; and with a sudden movement she drew her companion inside, closing the door, and placing her back against it.

She held up her hand to enforce silence, pointing to the open door; and so they stood in that awful stillness,



motionless in that dim, shadowy room, until the voices and steps had died away. Then she opened the door noiselessly and looked out. The terrace was clear, and she turned to beckon to Balfie. He had moved to the centre of the room, his footfall making no sound on the velvet carpet, and he stood now in front of the dressing-table. He was hidden from the girl's gaze by the snowy draperies; but in the shadowy depths of that mirror opposite she saw dimly outlined the form of a roughly-coated man, stooping over a duplicate of that glittering table, stooping just where a ray of light falling sharply through the chink of the door seemed to have found something to attract and refract its rays.

Only for a moment was that dim picture presented to her gaze, then he was by her side, and with rapid noiseless steps they crossed the terrace, stealing under the larches to the shelter of the pine grove.

Even in the thick shadow of those fragrant pines, breathing out their grateful incense to the night, the dead white of the girl's face was visible to the tramp, as leaning against a tree she waited for him to speak. Something in her manner, something like restraint, struck him.

'This is your welcome, is it? Your welcome to your father?'

She did not answer.

'What notions have you got into your head? Tell me that.'

Even yet he exercised somewhat of the old power over her, but there was no fear, only a great misery in her eyes as she looked up at him.

‘If I have notions, they don’t give me much happiness. I wish I could lose them.’

‘I know what ye’re going to tell me—that ye’re his daughter. But do you think I’ll let you? he hissed fiercely. ‘Ay, turn in loathing from me, show your disgust of the wretch who lost his child fifteen years ago; but don’t think that he’ll have what I haven’t—what I never can have—a daughter. Shut your lips from calling me father; maybe it’s only right you should hate me; but you shan’t call him. Yes, yes, your notions are all right; the miserable story told three years ago was true, true as gospel. I have no daughter.’

Intense misery was in that wail, it penetrated all sense of wrong, and entered into that pitying heart.

‘Poor father, I will still call you so if you wish it. You have sinned, but you have also suffered.’

‘Do you not hate me?’

‘Who am I that I should judge you?’


‘But I have wronged you; I must go on wronging you. I can’t, I won’t give back to him what he took from me.’

‘You could not if you would. The worst wrong you could do me now would be to thrust upon that poor old man one who could only disgrace him. Don’t do that. If you pity me, let me have the satisfaction of knowing that I shall trouble him no more.’

It was long, long before he spoke again; then he asked—

‘How is it that you can forgive, even pity me?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said, wearily, ‘unless it is that I am so very miserable myself that I have no heart to be bitter to one equally wretched.’



‘And you are so very wretched?’ he asked, with something like remorse in his gloomy eyes.

‘Yes,’ she said, still so wearily. ‘I did not know you were coming, and I formed a plan. Don’t thwart it.’

‘What plan?’

‘I am going away to-night—now.’

‘Where? Why? Is Miss Ingram sending you?’

‘Miss Ingram?’ and even in her desolation her smile was beautiful as she thought of that loyal friend. ‘No; she will be more astonished than anyone.’

‘But why are you going away?’

‘Because I should never have come. My presence here is a wrong to that poor old man, to that noble lady. Who am I that I should thrust her out from her place?’

‘And you are going away?’ he said, stupefied.

‘Yes,’ she said desolately, ‘away from every friend I have. Oh, why should I be hard on you, I who know now what it is to stand alone in the world?’

‘Since when did you know that you were the lawful heiress of Ingram?’

‘Since last Friday. I waited till to-night, thinking Mr. Blennerhasset would be gone every day, but he delayed on account of Lord Ingram’s illness.’

‘Was he ill?’ he asked eagerly.

‘Yes, yes, ill and suffering, and I could not help him. Oh don’t, don’t make me a heavier burden to him, promise me that; let me go quietly, don’t thwart my plan.’

‘I won’t thwart you,’ he said quietly. ‘But—ah! well—you’re thwarting Miss Ingram, and I must do the same. I can’t help it; no, even looking at your white face, even

looking into your pitying heart, I can't help it. She's a clever young lady, but I must balk her, or she'll be having it all her own way, as she said in her letter.'

'Does she write to you?'

'To be sure she does. Don't I know her scheme as well as you do? And didn't she wind me round to help her? And didn't she try to wind me round altogether?'

'Oh! how good she is—how noble!' said the girl, clasping her hands.

'Yes, it was a fine scheme; but as good as it was it must be defeated. You want it defeated. Isn't that it?' and the tramp bent forward to look keenly into the girl's face.

Not weak, not vacillating now. The lines had come and settled themselves once more round the mouth as in days gone by.

'Yes, that is it. You will help me?'

'I will help you—I must; and I will do it so that Miss Ingram will have no way to go to work if she were twice as clever, and she is a clever young lady. It was that brought me here to-night, and all you've to do is to go back the way you came. That was Lady Devereux's dressing-room?'

'Yes.'

'Ah! my information is generally correct. Mind you go back that way. When do you start?'

'There is a train on the Eastern line at five this morning.'

'That will do. This flight of yours saves me a good deal of trouble. Before you go, tell me again you forgive me for still keeping you from him,' he added, speaking with a remorse neither himself nor his listener could comprehend.

'I do' she said drearily, 'from my heart I do; it is the only kindness you can do me now.'

'No, not a kindness, only another cruel wrong. And yet, though I can't drive out the devil that bids me do it, I ask you not to hate me, even though you know I am not your father.'

'I do not hate you, I am too sorry for you. You have wronged me, but you were wronged yourself; I can never forget that. No, I shall not hate you; and if it is any comfort to you, still think of me as your daughter to replace the one lost, for I shall never have another father.'

CHAPTER XX.

MR. BLENNERHASSET'S PUZZLE. MISS INGRAM'S INDIGNATION.

CHARLIE'S CONVICTION.

LORD INGRAM was a little better, and Mr. Blennerhasset began to think of starting on his deferred journey. He knew that the success Lady Devereux so eagerly sought would have a very opposite result to what she intended, yet he would not turn aside. It had been confided to him to discover the truth, and the truth he would discover.

Mrs. Chirrup came down to breakfast, as she always did. The sweet rose-tinted face set in its silver framework was very sad. A heavier cloud than the illness of Lord Ingram was upon it, but she greeted Mr. Blennerhasset with the gentle cordiality that was part of her nature.

'I wonder Flossy is not down,' she said. 'Neither she

nor Miss L'Estrange are late risers. Wilmot,' she added, 'you had better see if the young ladies are up.'

It was a long time before Wilmot returned; when he did he looked a little scared and a good deal puzzled.

'Miss Flossy'll be down directly, ma'am;' then he stopped, with a peculiar expression of mystery on his stolid face.

'Very well. What's the matter, Wilmot?'

Mr. Blennerhasset as well as his mistress was looking at him now, and he stammered and fidgeted in the way peculiar to the raw recruits from the great unwashed.

'I donno, ma'am; maybe the young lady is all right.'

'What young lady?'

He looked awkwardly at the great lawyer, with a sort of pitying glance that irritated Mr. Blennerhasset out of all politeness.

'Speak, you blockhead!' he said, in a voice that completely silenced Wilmot. Mrs. Chirrup rose from her seat as the door was flung open and Miss Ingram entered.

'Godmother,' she said abruptly, 'did Kate sleep in your room last night?'

'No, my dear. What has happened?'

Miss Ingram made no reply; she only stood looking bewildered and troubled.

'I suppose, Mr. Blennerhasset,' she said at length, 'you can give me no help?'

'What is the matter, Miss Ingram?'

'Kate is not here. Did she leave no note, no message for you?'

'No; she may be out walking.'

'Of course, my love. You are nervous after the excitement of your uncle's illness.'

'Perhaps I am. Wilmot, bring me some chocolate.' No sooner had the man left the room than she leaned forward on the table, saying in a low voice,

'Her bed was not used last night, though she retired early. Something has happened. Make no *esclandre* till we see if we can find her.'

Wilmot returned with the chocolate, and she made a pretence of breakfasting. Mr. Blennerhasset sat for a few minutes pondering in gloomy silence, until the sound of a horse's hoofs rattled on the gravelled walk, and Charlie Devereux came up at a swinging gallop.

'Late as usual, Aunt Agatha,' he called out with his merry laugh, at the same time springing into the room. Miss Ingram was already beside him.

'Charlie, I want to speak to you.' She drew him out on the terrace.

'Have you seen Kate?'

'She's gone, Charlie.'

'Gone!' he repeated, stupefied. 'Gone from Rohan Blennerhasset?'

'Worse than that, Charlie; gone from all of us. But she cannot be far, so come inside till we arrange how to find her.'

She had done well to let him bear the shock away from all eyes but her own. Himself again in a moment, he followed his cousin.

It was hastily agreed that Miss Ingram in her pony carriage, and the two gentlemen on horseback, should try the three most likely directions, in the meanwhile using the telegraph as might seem best.

'But what could have taken her away?' Mrs. Chirrup said piteously. 'Supposing it was an accident—those rivers—the beach is so treacherous.'

'No, godmother, it was no accident.'

'No, it was no accident, that is plain,' Mr. Blennerhasset said gloomily. 'Miss L'Estrange has intentionally quitted the house, whatever her motive may be.'


'Whatever her motive may be,' interrupted Charlie Devereux, 'I'll stake my life that it was a good one.'

'Of course it was a good one, my dear boy,' said Mrs. Chirrup, smiling affectionately up at her nephew. 'We have not had Kate with us for so long merely to suspect her now.'

Mr. Blennerhasset's face grew set and hard. What were these people babbling about? Had not his engagement been essentially one of reason—founded on reason—conducted altogether on principles of reason? And what semblance of reason was there in the young lady whom he had selected entirely for her dignity and propriety disappearing in this outlandish fashion, without a word of explanation, exposing him to the contemptuous pity of the very hirelings? Like rankling poison came the memory of Wilmot's compassionate look. It had galled him when he was ignorant of its meaning. It galled him a thousand times more now that the bitter knowledge had come to him. What motive could justify her?

He listened gloomily, sternly—almost protestingly—while the few simple directions were suggested by the cousins. He neither assented nor dissented, except in so far as to acquiesce in his own part. He offered neither blame nor sympathy for the absent. He sought neither pity nor advice from the present. Then they separated, and in a few minutes had started according to arrangement.

'Yes, I must seek her—I must find her, if only for an explanation,' Mr. Blennerhasset said to himself, as he



rode towards the station. 'But what explanation can compensate for the scandal that is now flying all over the country?'

It was three days before he returned to Ingram, and he only came then to fulfil a promise he had given to let them know his success. Miss Ingram was standing at one of the deep bay windows as he drove up. One glance at his face as he stepped out of the carriage that chill, wet day told her that his success had been no better than her own, and there was no enquiry, nothing but a great sorrow in the pale young face turned to greet him.

'I see you have nothing to tell me.'

'Nothing.'

He stood by the fireplace, and she, unnerved by the disappointment, turned again to the wintry landscape. There was something in her attitude that angered him; it was so grave, so dejected, so unlike Beatrice Ingram.

'You are grieving, Miss Ingram,' he said, in measured tones that rang with an inflexible sternness. 'There is no occasion for it. If your friend has gone from right motives, you have nothing to regret but the temporary loss of her society. If for faulty ones, she is not to be mourned.'

'How dare you, Mr. Blennerhasset? How dare you speak of Kate like that, and to me, too?' she exclaimed, turning on him, all the generous indignation of her nature flashing out of her eyes. 'How dare you put *if* to her name? Is your friend only to be trusted while she is in your sight? Is her absence to be the signal for every calumny to assail her? What have you seen in her conduct all the time you have known her but everything that was good, and womanly, and true? There is no *if*

about her motives. She is good, therefore they must be good. I will believe that, though I should never see her again.'

There was something in the girl's earnest manner very different from her natural frivolity—something that made Mr. Blennerhasset feel very bitter to this girl, who always had run counter to his wisdom, who at every turn in some way upset his most correct calculations. She turned again to the wintry landscape, with a wail in her heart.

'Oh, my poor Kate, have they known you all this time to suspect you now? What is to become of my plans?'

So lost was she that she did not hear the rustling of Lady Devereux's *moire robe* until her voice roused her.

'It is a strange business altogether, Mr. Blennerhasset, and one trouble never comes alone.'

She paused, and with a sudden dread Miss Ingram turned round sharply.

'Has anything fresh occurred?' Mr. Blennerhasset said abstractedly.

Lady Devereux hesitated for a moment, then she said,

'I have lost my diamond bracelet.'

'Well, aunt?'

Sharp and shrill came the interrogatory. Every fibre of Miss Ingram's frame was painfully, intensely alive. So bent was she on dragging out the secret with her eyes from that haughty, yet disturbed face, that she scarcely heeded the bespattered horseman who stood beside her.

'I left it on my dressing table last Tuesday night.'

Again came the sharp, shrill—

'Well, aunt?'

'It was not there at three in the morning, when I went to look for the laudanum.'

‘Why did you not miss it before, madam?’

It was Blennerhasset who spoke, and the haughty, handsome face of the lady was troubled. He winced again under the compassionate look, and crossing his arms on his bosom, he faced her with an implacable pride.

‘Go on, madam; I desire it.’

‘Then pardon me if I pain you. I mention it partly because I cannot avoid doing so, partly in the hope that it may be explained.’

‘Go on, madam. Nothing you have to say can affect me.’

‘Nothing you have to say can affect anyone here,’ added Charlie Devereux, speaking for the first time.

‘Have you any news, Charlie?’ she said, glad of a pause.

‘None. Don’t let me interrupt you, ma’am. You were speaking of a diamond bracelet.’

‘Mr. Blennerhasset asked why you did not miss it before,’ added Miss Ingram, whose eyes never left her aunt.

‘I thought Miss L’Estrange must have put it away.’

‘Why?’ Mr. Blennerhasset asked.

‘She was the last person in my dressing-room that night. The bracelet was there when she passed through; it was not there at three o’clock.’

‘And you think——’

‘That Miss L’Estrange must know where it is.’

‘You are mad, Aunt Beavoin,’ broke forth Miss Ingram. ‘Kate knows no more about it than I do. You have seen her goodness, her gentleness, with your own eyes, and at the first blush you believe her guilty. You are mad to suspect her of theft.’

'Who, my dear?' asked the sweet, clear voice of Mrs. Chirrup.

'Godmother, you knew Kate; you loved her, did you not?'

'I did, my dear.'

'And it was as much for her goodness—no, but more—than for her beauty that you loved her.'

'Yes, my dear.'

'Tell me, then, was Kate the one to commit a theft?'

'No. Oh, no; surely not.'

'I am sorry to say what so evidently grieves you, Beatrice,' said Lady Devereux, gravely. 'But facts are facts. I should not have mentioned the matter had I waited to think; but unfortunately I insisted on Atkinson finding it. I thought it better then to speak to you of it, before I go so far as to exonerate my servants.'

'Facts are very often but Jesuitical, two-faced liars, Beavoin,' said Mrs. Chirrup.

'Perhaps. You are wiser than I am,' replied Lady Devereux impatiently. 'Mr. Blennerhasset, I should be glad to have your advice on the matter. Will it be well, after what I have said, to continue the search, or to let it drop?'

He never moved from his position. With his hands still crossed on his bosom, his head slightly bent, his brow contracted, he stood immovable. Just a moment he paused before replying,

'To let it drop.'

No other words could have said more emphatically, 'I believe her guilty, this girl whom I have loved. But I cannot forget that I once loved her. Therefore I ask you

to be merciful.' For answer Charlie Devereux turned full on the cleverest lawyer in Ireland.

'You are not mad, for madmen have method; but you are a fool, Blennerhasset.'

Passion and surprise blazed in the blue eyes at words that few would have dared to utter—not one, perhaps, but handsome, gallant Charlie, lashed into uncontrollable rage by his loyal indignation.

'You are a fool,' he repeated, supreme contempt irradiating his face, curving his lips, dilating his nostrils. 'To think even for a second a woman like that could be guilty of such an abominable crime. If she had been starving in a hovel, she would not have done it.'

'You will answer for these words,' said Rohan Blennerhasset, stung by the tone of the tirade. 'But, in justice to myself, I must be permitted to remind you of our meeting on Tuesday night.'

'There is no need; I have not forgotten.'

'While accusing me of gratuitous suspicion you omit to state that on the night in question, when everyone was asleep, I saw Miss L'Estrange come out of Lady Devereux's dressing-room window on to the terrace, and that so did you.'

'I saw her,' said Charlie steadily.

'You saw, too, that she admitted and spoke with a man secretly, as if fearing detection. Lady Devereux has just stated that the bracelet which was on the table after the servants had retired was not there at three on Wednesday morning. You must admit that, if proof were wanting, our evidence must go to establish the fact that during that time no one was about, with the single exception of Miss L'Estrange.'

'I admit it; but I tell you it does not cause me even for a moment to wrong a woman pure and good. Whoever took that bracelet, Miss L'Estrange is innocent.'

There was scorn and unwavering belief in the true ringing voice.

'Neither do I wrong her,' said Blennerhasset, still in the same hard, stern voice. 'I do not think she took from any paltry desire for profit, or that she was tempted by a glittering bauble. I believe that she has acted under influence. I do her justice, you see.'

'Justice? You call that puny screening of yourself from contempt justice? I tell you it is a foul, miserable insult, unworthy of a man, to believe that any influence could tempt such a woman. It is infamous to suppose it. If I saw her do it, if I heard her voice telling me she was guilty, I should disbelieve the evidence of my senses and believe only in her unalterable unaltered goodness.'

Romantic, chivalrous Charlie! He made a brave stand for the truth of the girl he loved so secretly and so well, and would not know when he was beaten. And all this time Lady Devereux's heart was hardening against this girl who had infatuated her son with her sad eyes.

'I believe, then, that no further steps can be taken until we see if we can discover Miss L'Estrange,' she remarked coldly.

'We will let it be so if you wish, Aunt Beavoin,' said Miss Ingram, with a marked expression of determination. 'I do not for a moment suppose that she knows anything about it; but she is of more importance than a bracelet, so we will find her first.'

'If you take my advice you will let the matter drop, as

Lady Devereux has suggested. It will be the kindest course.'

'Yes, yes,' said Lord Ingram, who had listened eagerly, speaking feebly, almost imploringly, and following Mr. Blennerhasset's lead. 'Let her go, let her go; she has had enough of sorrow, I think, by her sad eyes.'

'You too!' exclaimed Miss Ingram, with an indescribable despair. 'Uncle, you cannot believe her guilty?'

He shrank beneath that searching look—he quailed, he trembled, but all he could murmur was—

'Let her go; it is best.'

'Yes, my love,' said Mrs. Chirrup tremulously; 'I do not blame her, but we cannot tell how she may have been tempted.'

'Everyone, everyone,' wailed Miss Ingram. 'Of what avail is goodness or truth? Out of all her friends who daily saw her simple, single life, there are only left, Charlie, you and I.'

They separated. The dressing bell had rung, and though their hearts might one and all be breaking, the evening costume must honour the banquet. Mr. Blennerhasset retired to the room appropriated to him. It was no wonder that he should be puzzled and troubled; but it was wonder that what puzzled him more than anything else in that hour of sorrow, should be the vigorous and energetic defence of her friend by the butterfly heiress.

'Charlie,' whispered Miss Ingram, as she stole along the passage with him, 'that man does not love her.'

'Why do you think that?' he whispered.

'Because he is hard and cruel—unjust and suspicious; because he has given utterance to thoughts for which I

shall never forgive him. He is not worthy of Kate, or he would not have said them.'

'Only the words of passion,' said Charlie Devereux slowly, bending over his cousin. 'Don't attach any importance to them; he forgot them as soon as they were said, and so must you.'

'No, I won't,' she said resentfully, 'and I'm sure he doesn't. Ah! you don't know him; what a cold white anger his is; how, when you think it is quite dead and ready to be cast out, it scorches and withers you up.'

'He might keep up anger with others,' said Charlie, still speaking slowly, 'but not with the woman he loves. Don't believe it, Flossy.'

The resentment died out of her face—everything, save a loving, tender admiration.

'I was wrong,' she said, very humbly. 'Oh, Charlie, how good, how true you are.'

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. BLENNERHASSET ASTONISHES MR. DEVEREUX, AND

MR. DEVEREUX ASTONISHES MR. BLENNERHASSET.

'BLENNERHASSET, I have found a clue.'

'What?' and the haughty head was raised in cold surprise from the pile of papers that littered the table of the Dublin chambers.

'I have traced her,' and Charlie Devereux, travel-stained and dusty, threw himself on the couch, passing his hand wearily across his forehead.

‘I don’t understand. You’ll be good enough to explain.’

Charlie looked up slowly.

‘You need not be jealous,’ he said at length. ‘She need never know that my endeavours were more successful than yours.’

‘You are a complete puzzle to-night, and I hate riddles,’ remarked the lawyer, with haughty disdain.

‘It is you who are the puzzle,’ said Charlie, rising from the sofa. ‘Is it nothing to you that I have discovered Miss L’Estrange?’

The blue eyes flashed ominously.

‘Nothing; except that it is kind of you to bring me the latest news. I think I had a conversation on this subject before. I meant it to be final, but you seem to have forgotten.’

‘No, I have not forgotten. But what if you told me, that since she had not thought it worth her while to give you any explanation, you desired all to be, as she evidently wished, at an end? What if you said that, and much more? These were the words of passion.’

‘You mistake; they were the expression of my deliberate, unalterable determination. Miss L’Estrange, from the hour in which she acted in a manner unbefitting the woman I had chosen, was nothing to me.’

‘Did you not love her?’

‘What if I did?’ exclaimed the lawyer, losing all self-control. ‘Is every folly a man commits to be thrown in his face till the end of time?’

‘Folly!’ interrupted Charlie furiously. ‘Why, the wisest thing you ever did was to love a girl a thousand

times better than you. Call it selfishness, covetousness, presumption, but don't call it folly.'

'You are welcome to your opinion,' and Mr. Blennerhasset relapsed into his supreme indifference.

'Folly?' continued Charlie passionately. 'No, not folly, but cruelty and blindness to win her love by a show of yours, instead of leaving her for a better, a truer man.'

CHAPTER XXII.

ROHAN BLENNERHASSET'S TROUBLES.

MR. BLENNERHASSET was nearly beside himself. Certainly there were many things calculated to put out even this calm, methodical gentleman. In the first place, this girl had deceived him; that is to say, he had formed a certain estimate which she had failed to arrive at—an unpardonable offence in Mr. Blennerhasset's code. He never of course thought of blaming his own judgment, of arraigning it for having arrived at favourable conclusions too hastily; or, on the other hand, of assuming evil without just grounds. That was bad enough, but it was nothing like all; no, indeed, Miss Ingram, Flossy the flirt, what did she mean by her championship of the absent friend? What did a butterfly know of friendship? It was much more likely that she assumed that tone merely because her perception told her that it would annoy and disappoint him. Of course, pure contrariness; that was the name for it; yet, somehow, there was a depth of earnestness in the contrari-

ness that disappointed his calculations more than ever, which was the greatest of his grievances. Then, as if it was not enough for Miss Ingram to preach to him, there was Mrs. Chirrup as cold as might be Lady Devereux herself, merely because he had distrusted a stranger. Her grave, sad, reproving glance told him plainer than words that he was wrong and suspicious, instead of the reasonable, rigidly just man of discernment that he had always prided himself on being. Then there was that Charlie Devereux gone raving mad. Of course he must be mad to come and speak to him as he had done. Raving mad even to think of such a thing. What! bring him, Rohan Blennerhasset, to book? Tell him that his intelligent doubts were unworthy, baseless suspicions, signs of inherent instability? The thing was only to be laid to lunacy of the most hopeless kind.

Jenny Joy could not set herself to her work at all. Blinding her to the brilliant spangles, and yellow satin, and gold braid, came the vision of a sweet, sad face that only a few days ago she had envied, that only a few days ago she had arraigned before Heaven as a witness to the glaring discrepancy of her own lonely lot. Yes, envied; not so far as to grudge her darling one tithe of the happiness crowding round her—oh, no, not so bad as that—but calling out to a just Providence that the lot of this girl was all bright and fair and beautiful, while hers was dark, loathsome, gloomy with the gloom of a life solitude.

What a terrible magnitude that sin of envy assumed now. It seemed to her terrified imagination that as she had hated her father to death, so she had envied Kate out of her fair place. She could not rid herself of this idea, reason as she might. It haunted her day and night. She

had plenty of sound common sense, and logic too, ignorant though she was, but get rid of that thought she could not. She cried her eyes red in the depth of her remorse, and would not be comforted, though she told herself over and over that Heaven would surely never listen to her rebellious murmurings to injure Kate. The guilt was on her, and would not be shaken off.

If she had found it hard to refrain from hating Rohan Blennerhasset, she found it well-nigh impossible now. All his calm judicial reason was so much cruelty to her, all his unanswerable justice rank injustice, his dispassionate resolve to exact an explanation before deigning again to notice Kate the grossest tyranny. A sudden revulsion of feeling came when she learned that Mr. Blennerhasset was gone on a tour through the country.

‘He is gone to seek her,’ she said penitently. ‘I had no right to judge. The words of passion are soon forgotten. Mr. Devereux was right.’

Would he be successful? That was the thought that troubled her day and night, that entangled her ideas of costumes, that hopelessly hindered her work, and sent the artists of the Theatre Royal into despair. Trained skirts for the ballet dancers and flounces to the waist for the tragedy queen became a common occurrence, while Hamlet found his velvet cloak charmingly bespangled the very night of performance.

Many were the pilgrimages she made around and about, till the manager was driven to the very verge of despair; but she could learn nothing, except of the movements of the great lawyer.

He had gone north, and was starring it on his way. She was surprised at that, but considered that if he was

fêted, and lauded, and dragged into public, it was the misfortune of his wide-spread fame. At last the news came that he was coming back. He would surely come through Rosehill. He did; and the instant she knew he was at the little inn she started to catch him before he should have time to change horses for Ingram.

There was no sign of changing horses before the inn, though there was a great bustle, as there always was wherever Mr. Blennerhasset stopped. She learned incidentally that the distinguished visitor was to remain an hour, at the end of which time the carriage was to be ready to take him to town.

'I want to see Mr. Blennerhasset,' Jenny Joy said, stepping up to the door.

'Ah, now, think of that,' said the head waiter, with a smile of good-humoured irony. 'Maybe it's the Prince of Wales ye want, only ye made a thrifling mistake?'

The wee mite looked up at him in astonishment. It had never struck her that there would be anything strange in her speaking to Kate's engaged husband. Now the quickness of her instinct revealed the man's meaning; but she would see Mr. Blennerhasset, though it looked ten times as strange.

'Don't stand there grinning like a sheep's head cooked. I have business with Mr. Blennerhasset.'

'Business, is it? To be sure, what mistakes people will make. It's a visit I thought it was,' the man said, still with the same good-humoured smile on his face.

The black eyes began to flash. A sudden noise directed her attention to a window; a servant had just thrown it open. She looked in. Mr. Blennerhasset was reading a letter at the table, and in an instant she was beside him.

He waited to finish the letter before he even looked ; then he certainly started a little. It was getting dusk, and there was something uncommonly elfish in the appearance of the dressmaker of the Theatre Royal, who had entered without opening a door, and who looked as if it would have been quite as easy for her to have flown in through the window as to have stepped over the sill.

‘How did you come here?’

‘Have you heard anything of Kate?’

It had not struck him as strange in the little attic that Miss L’Estrange should be called simply Kate by the witch; but it grated queerly on his ear now. Miss L’Estrange might have been his wife, and who was this weird sprite who called her Kate?

‘What is Miss L’Estrange to you?’

‘What is she to me?’ said Jenny, folding her small arms, with a strange, puzzled look, ‘why, everything. She’s all that I have in the world. Have you heard of her?’

‘Is she related to you?’

‘No, no; she is only my pet bird, my little ladybird, my heart’s treasure. What relationship is equal to that? Have you nothing to tell me?’

‘Nothing,’ he said at length, constrained to answer her tone of pained entreaty. ‘What should I have to tell you?’

‘Had you no success at all at all? Not a word? Has your long journey been for nothing?’

‘No; my journey has not been for nothing, but I have nothing to tell you concerning Miss L’Estrange. I cannot even imagine why you apply to me.’

‘What! Haven’t you been looking for her?’

If a glance could have annihilated, Jenny would have disappeared in a fit of spontaneous combustion. It told her at once the haughty contempt with which he repudiated all claim of Kate.

‘Looking for whom?’

‘For Kate, Miss L'Estrange, your wife that is to be.’

‘Miss L'Estrange will never be any wife of mine. She was a stranger to me when believing in her innate goodness I chose her; she is a stranger to me now that I know how I was deceived. It is an insult to suppose anything else.’

He recoiled a step before the blazing tempest of wrath that swept over the sallow face, lighting up the glorious, flashing eyes, blazoning its haughty crimson on the thin, pinched cheek of the little worker.

‘How dare you? How dare you, I say, couple insult with the name of one who is a thousand times too good for you? Deceived you! No; she never deceived you, but you deceived her, for you pretended to love her, and I tell you that you never loved her.’

Perhaps there was just the sting of truth in the elf's words. Perhaps it was that that brought the angry blood to his face and brow. Perhaps it was that gave power to this insignificant little creature to provoke this impassive man of law.

‘You forget yourself, Miss Joice. I am not to be called to account for my actions.’

‘No, no; you never loved her, or you would love her now. You never loved her, or you would know how to trust her now. Oh, I wouldn't give much for your love or liking, Mr. Blennerhasset; it's fairweather liking, and when the first little storm comes, good-bye to it. But how

dare you turn round and say she deceived you? You deceived her, and you deceived me. I thought all this time you were looking for her, and only for that thought I'd have been hunting for her myself. Poor thing, poor thing! we have left her to her fate, whatever it is, without much trouble. Never be your wife? No, I hope she won't. I should die if she married you, for you hate her, and I hate you.'

She stopped suddenly, wringing her hands as if in pain.

'I never thought that word to pass my lips again. Forgive me, sir. I don't hate you; no, I don't. But don't you hate my poor darling; no, don't, or you may be sorry for it all your life.'

He paced the room up and down. At length he paused.

'Do you know anything of her?'

'No; I wish I did.'

'I mean as to why she went away.'

'No, sir.'

'And yet you judge me hardly. What right have you to do that? She has gone away without a word of explanation. She has dragged my name before a scandal-loving public. Supposing I hated her, would I not have a right to do so?'

'Oh, that she should have loved this man!' exclaimed Miss Joice, with ineffable disdain, as she turned away. 'Oh, to think she could have thought he loved her!'

She was gone, and the momentary interest that always attached itself to her originality and vigour died out, and he remembered only the annoyance of even this little creature presuming to join in the universal reproach that was only so stinging because it was so true.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS INGRAM MAKES A CONFIDANT.

MISS INGRAM was sorely troubled. But for the abstraction of the diamond bracelet she would have known what to do. She had summoned Balfe, but he did not come, though she knew he was near, and she soon guessed that this new trouble was but part of his scheme to render her powerless—the answer to her declaration that she could no longer keep silence. She had heard nothing from Charlie for a very long time, and Lord Ingram's health began visibly to fail. He had never been quite the same since that apoplectic fit; and if she recurred to the conversation that brought it on, what could she say to comfort him? While telling him that the outcast was no longer an unlettered child, but a graceful lovely girl, she could not hide this new stigma. In this perplexity she received a letter from her old friend Robert Dalzell, promising a visit.

She welcomed this simple, single-minded painter as she would have welcomed no other. He would sympathise with her grief without a single attempt to pry into it. Mrs. Chirrup, too, esteemed Robert Dalzell beyond all others. She was simple enough to understand his simplicity, good enough to reverence his goodness, clever enough to recognise the genius of this man, who bore his success as patiently and meekly as though it had not come too late; as he had borne the adversity of his early life, the bitter disappointments that had brought old age in prime.

After all it is a great sorrow this—to bear old age on your silvered hair, your furrowed brow, while your heart is yet young. Men can fold their arms in contentment and say, ‘I have lived my life;’ but how few can summon perfect resignation while the human heart within them is crying out, ‘I have never lived my life. I never shall live it as other men do; it has been taken from me.’ Yet this was what Robert Dalzell was doing.

True he could say, ‘I have lived and loved.’ He had dearly loved the pretty gentle girl who had gone to the same village school, who had come to him, always to him, in any trifling perplexity, with an instinctive sense of the pleasure it gave him to serve her. But she had not loved him; he had never been anything but a very dear brother to her; and when he went away to seek his fortune, she gave her heart to the bold dashing scamp who had been Robert’s comrade. Perhaps it was this event that caused him to become such an earnest worker, paying the penalty that earnest workers always do, that had caused him to throw himself heart and soul into the effort to support his mother. Oh, how hard he had struggled all these years for a mere pittance, but still he struggled on, and all the time he was wearing away his youth.

Well, well, it was all over now. Success had come, but his mother was dead. He was alone in the world, but it was too late to alter that now. He could never get another mother, and old age had come upon him. He was not one now to seek a wife. If success had only come when he was yet young!

It was a dangerous thought, and he would not dwell on it. He never thought of arraigning the goodness of the Providence that had permitted him to spend the best years

of his life in a struggle for bread. But he was sometimes tempted to bow his head beneath the sudden success that crushed him, and ask why, when withheld so long, it was bestowed now; why he was not permitted, having struggled through life, to struggle out of it, to go down to his grave without having had time to think of the struggle?

How we pity the workers who, still workers, earnest, disappointed workers, slip out of life without sound of muffled drum and honorary salute and velvet pall. How we wonder at the mysterious decrees which permit these men, workers all their lives, to work to the end, only to rest on the other side of Jordan.

How we clap our hands and exult at the traditional poetic justice that crowns the busy sculptor with bays, that flings sudden laurels on the brow of the painter who for forty years was obscure. How we hug to ourselves the axiom that time rights all things. And yet it might have been better for that sculptor that he had still bent his mighty mind to creating dreams of beauty out of stone and marble, that he never had leisure to recall the face of the wife of his youth, who died in the cold chill garret long years before, of the wee baby who smiled in Heaven as, poor pinched little thing, it had never smiled on earth; better for the painter that a great need to live somehow had still compelled him to reproduce the phantoms of the past on canvas, that in their ideal beauty he might forget that he was too young to be thus lonely, too old to ever be anything else; that he might be forced to give vent to feelings that, nursed under his cloak, would gnaw his heart out.

Perhaps it was some instinctive conception of a great sorrow that attracted these women to Robert Dalzell, that

determined Miss Ingram to confide her perplexities to him. Pacing under the beech trees, away from all listening ears, she told him her story. He received it in all simplicity, for he set down her bounty of esteem to the goodness of her heart, not to any merit of his.

‘I could not have acted otherwise,’ she said, after a pause in which she had waited anxiously for him to speak. ‘I would not have promised that man to be silent but that I knew it would be harder on Lord Ingram to welcome one daughter who was a disgrace to him, than to mourn the loss of twenty did he love them as his life.’

‘But do you not think his suffering now is greatly owing to grief for his daughter’s fate?’

‘Oh, yes,’ and she sighed.

‘Well, then, don’t you think it would be well to set his mind at ease, to tell him that this young lady, charming, accomplished even, as you describe her, is his veritable daughter?’

‘Mr. Dalzell, it would damage everything. It might afford him some transient relief to know she was no out-cast; but to receive her with this new slur upon her would for ever prevent his placing full confidence in her, and thus be an effectual barrier to his and her happiness. No, no, if he cannot give her from his heart an honourable welcome, I almost think he had better never welcome her at all. If—if anything happened to him, of course Kate would at once step into her place. It could not grieve him then.’

‘Does he then believe her capable of this petty theft?’

‘He does. After seeing her from day to day, after being compelled to acknowledge that he felt she was good, he does believe it. Is it not incredible?’

He bowed his head in silence, and they strolled to and fro under the grand old trees.

'And worse than that, Mr. Dalzell, Mr. Blennerhasset believes the same.'

'Then he never loved her.'

'Pardon, he did love her, but it is his nature to distrust even where he loves.'

'He never did love her or he would love her still.'

Her heart gave a great throb of pain, so keen that it was not all pain; then it went away, and she said, very quietly,

'He did love her; he loves her still.'

'You think that?'

'I know it.'

'And he has given up all search?'

'It is not his nature to seek one whom he distrusts ever so slightly.'

'What ground then have you for saying he still loves her?'

'He is unhappy.'

'Ah!'

Perhaps a chord was touched that breathed of a time when he had not distrusted and yet was unhappy. Perhaps he thought love might take a different form with great and clever men to what it did with such a simple, foolish person as himself. Be that as it may, he offered no further condemnation of Mr. Blennerhasset.

'You, too, have been unhappy,' he said, without the most remote idea of connecting his remark with Miss Ingram's last sentence. She felt sick and giddy. She forgot that no word had been uttered that could afford him a clue to her secret. She only remembered that she

had a secret, and this man in his simple guilelessness seemed to her so marvellously wise.

‘I have been considering of late, Mr. Dalzell, that we are not born merely to please ourselves. It is not always easy to perceive the design of our being, but it is never one so unworthy as that ; though we are so willing to make it our religion, that trouble, sore trouble, is sometimes needed to turn us from our idolatry.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW ROBERT DALZELL’S GENIUS CAME BACK TO HIM.

ALL along the view winds the broad river that formed the eastern boundary of Ingram. From the Shannon to the sea the demesne spread in hill and valley and forest and lawn. Great trees guard the banks of the beautiful river, drooping willows stoop to kiss its waves. Heavy clouds, piled in all the majesty of a gorgeous sunset, shine in barbaric splendour in the western heavens, tipping the mountains with fire, turning the waters into blood.

A man sits on the river bank. He has thrown aside in despair his canvas, stained as it is with brilliant patches. His genius has flown ; Nature defies him.

It has happened so before. But he has struggled, and been triumphant, for his genius has returned mightier than ever. But why struggle now ?

He is rich enough ; and for fame—what is it ? There is not a single human being whom he could expect to

rejoice at his success or weep for his trouble. The dark hour was upon him. He could not think of Miss Ingram's troubles, he could see nothing but his own loneliness.

His spirit travelled over the records of the past, only to grow tired and weary ; over the bleak and barren future, only to grow more tired and weary still.

'Work ? yes, I must work,' he said, taking up his easel. 'It is the only cure. It has answered before, why not now ?'

But again the clouds were patches ; the purple mountains formless streaks on the canvas. In despair he dropped it, and buried his face in his hands.

'Am I losing that, too ? Is nothing to be left to me—not even my art ?'

Indescribable wretchedness was in his voice—in his attitude. He sat thus, when suddenly a soft hand touched his shoulder.

'Is it in trouble you are, sir ?'

Was it fancy, or was it the sweet young face of Susie Longford ? He sat for some seconds gazing into the face that suddenly had grown pale. She clasped her hands in mute entreaty. What would he say to her, this man who had loved her mother ? He would not reproach her, he was too magnanimous for that ; but he would turn from her in disgust ; and, oh ! how she had longed for his esteem ; she had coveted his good opinion as ardent, passionate natures covet.

Was it all a beautiful, beautiful dream, or did he really take her hands in his ? Was it really his voice that sounded in the still evening ?

'Jenny, dear child, have I really found you at last ?'

She looked up at him timidly, wonderingly.

'I hunted everywhere for you, Jenny. Why did you hide from me all these years?'

'You hunted for me, sir, after the way I went away?'

'You don't suppose I thought any ill of you? Child I know you better than you know yourself. I could no think ill of you. I never did.'

'You trusted me?' said the little creature, and the tear fell like rain. 'You trusted me through all?'

'Through all, Jenny.'

She looked up in wondering admiration of the grav strength on the furrowed face; but she could not tell what gave that sudden ring of gladness to a voice ever pure and true. Neither in truth could he. He did not know that it was the thought of possession that had brought back his genius, that made him feel he was once again Robert Dalzell the painter; that the glorious sunset, the gorgeous splendour that had defied him an hour ago, would grow a part of his touch into a being that should live for centuries—the evidence of a Divine art. Yes, he had discovered a human being so linked to the past that no one could dispute his claim upon her, his right to lavish on her the wealth of his nature that had defied alike untimely adversity and prosperity to render misanthropical. It was a wonderful transformation.

This child should be his daughter. He did not put the idea into words, but it was a glorious thought that her eyes might grow bright at his success; that her heart—that heart that he knew to be so warm, so passionate—might thrill at the fame he would now value.

She was not a pretty child, some would have said, or woman, whichever she was; for as she had been a woman in childhood, so now she was a child in womanhood. Ye

with his artistic love of the beautiful, the graceful in outline, the glowing and harmonious in colouring, he would not have exchanged that little black-eyed elf—that relic of the long past, with the memories of a dreamy southern village home, where Sabbath mornings had a balmier air, and sweet church bells had a more silvery chime than in any part of the wide, wide world; in whose far-off legends were the golden days of his dreary life—for an Aphrodite.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISS BAYLEY'S LODGER.

It was a breezy, beautiful little seaside town where Kate found her new home. Her duties were tolerably heavy, but her gentle manner made her a favourite; and she did not regret that, when the children's lessons were over, Mrs. Meltham preferred that she should read to her to going out with the Indians.

Mrs. Meltham's cottage was nearer to the beach than any other. The pretty strip of lawn broken up by flower-beds innumerable, brilliant with winter flowers, stretched from the bay windows down to the water side. The drawing-room was large and commodious, and commanded a full view of Tramore Bay. In a low comfortable chair by the fire the widow sat placidly working at a woollen lamb.

She was a woman with whom the world had gone pretty smooth; that is to say, she had no nearer trouble than the death of near and dear relations, whose obsequies

did not come out of her pocket, and whose loss, involving no corresponding pecuniary distress, was a matter to be mourned in a resigned, Christian way.

She was not a cruel woman ; that is to say, she would not have inflicted upon herself the pain of seeing anything in violent agony. On the same principle she would not impose upon persons with a temper likely to flare up, or with dangerously sarcastic propensities. But Miss L'Estrange had come to her without references ; and as she had a quiet, timid manner that inspired confidence, it was but natural to Mrs. Meltham to require sundry services not usually expected, even of nursery governesses, to make good her deficiencies in the all-important matter. She would, for instance, let down her back hair, and graciously permit Kate to stand, brush in hand, for an hour or two, with aching back, and tired feet, and strained hands. Perhaps the most aggravating part of it was the way in which she constantly declared her surprise at the peculiar fancy Miss L'Estrange had for brushing her hair.

Miss L'Estrange was reading. She was not quite so near the fire as the lady, but that, perhaps, was after all not such a disadvantage, as she was less susceptible to the chill of the passages, when every five minutes the reading was interrupted, and the reader despatched to the kitchen, or to the top bedroom to see if the windows were shut, or begged just to put on her hat and run down to the beach, and see that no worse harm than probable death by starvation from cold was come to the shivering West Indians, her charges.

Mrs. Meltham was unusually provoking to-day. Twice had Kate been down to the windy, shingly beach ; out each time just long enough for the blustering north wind to

pierce her through and through, but not long enough for it to brace her. Three times had she been down to the irritated Betty, whose temper she felt sure would not stand another message from the parlour; five times had she been to give tiny commands to the meek, martyred housemaid, who began to look upon Kate as the baleful author of the tantalising particularities that worried her life out. Fully three minutes had elapsed since the last errand had been despatched, and Kate began to pause in her reading, expecting every moment the interruption that must come.

‘Miss L’Estrange.’

Kate laid down her book with a look of utter weariness. Inexpressibly dreary was this life becoming to her. Shut out from all intercourse with her kind; reduced to an isolation even greater than that of her early life, since she had now no Jenny; condemned to a perpetual companionship with this woman, between whose nature and hers there was a great gulf fixed that neither could bridge over. And let me tell, if you do not already know, that the dreariest solitude is preferable to such companionship as that. The lonely old maid can fill the vacant chair in her vivid fancy; can make the sweet face of a loved one smile sympathisingly over the hissing tea-urn; can bid dear voices discourse of that which is nearest to her heart. But when the chair is filled by a bodily presence, the illusion is not so easily produced; more especially if it is a presence commanding a thousand petty exactions—the tithes and taxes that a woman of position exacts from her poorer sister. It is not so easy to surround ourselves with the spirits of the past, when their airy being is put to flight by the presence of a negative force that never can be anything but a negative at best, that while depriving you of the resources your soul

craves to keep it from melancholy madness, can never, by any chance, assimilate itself to your wants. If you are alone, in the common acceptation of the term, you can give vent to your grief, your despair, to the rocks, the trees, the mountains. You can brace yourself to loneliness with the free sweet air of Heaven; you can, if deprived of other ambition, measure your fleetness with the chamois, pit your skill against the brute force of the lower creation. Or, at the worst, if poverty ties you down to the curse of Adam, you can pursue your toil, and shut yourself up in a field of fancy where shines a sun brighter than any our earth ever looked up to, where trees are greener and flowers more fragrant, where the birds have a sweeter melody, a more thrilling song. But tied to an uncongenial companion—worst of all in a subservient position, watching word and look, denied the boon of perfect silence even; you are not only in solitude, but in chains, your plight is worse than that of the hapless sufferers chained to the dead bodies, for they at least might cry out their loathing and detestation of the horrid incubus.

‘I have just been thinking,’ Mrs. Meltham continued, ‘that perhaps that gentleman I mentioned to Miss Bayley has arrived, and she has not thought it worth her while to let me know. Considering that it was I who wrote to him, it is not polite of her, but she is quite capable of it. Put on your hat, and go over and ask with my compliments if there are any new arrivals.’

Kate had always been a coward, and she could not dispute with this woman, who had taken her without references.

Miss Bayley’s private boarding-house was almost the next house, it was therefore no walk. She knocked at

the prim-looking door with its resplendent knocker, and it was opened by Miss Bayley herself.

‘Law, child! Come inside; you’re blue with cold.’

‘No, thank you, Miss Bayley.’

‘Going for a walk?’

‘No.’

‘Well, you ought to be. You’d come back red instead of blue. You might as well be in all this time as keeping me here too.’

‘Mrs. Meltham only wants to know if the gentleman she spoke about has come.’

‘That she recommended; say it out. Just like her. Well, you may tell her that he has, and it’s just like her to recommend such a lodger to a decent woman. He’s mad, stark, staring mad. There, you needn’t look scared, he’s not about just now, but he’s mad if ever a man was. He doesn’t know turtle soup from mutton broth, and he thinks to convert me into a general directory. Fact, I assure you. Talk of the Bengal Tiger—but he’s turned the house topsy-turvy since he’s been here, and just you tell Mrs. Meltham so, if she has the ladylike tact to turn her wards’ governess into a messenger.’

Miss Bayley paused. She was a short woman. Short every way. Short of body, short of speech, and short of breath.

‘Good morning, then.’

‘One moment. You see I told you we might as well be inside. Come in, do.’

‘Thank you, I’d rather not,’ said Kate gratefully. She had a liking for the sharp-spoken little woman, and the sharp-spoken little woman had a liking for her.

‘Well, the like of you for obstinacy I never met.

You're a mule, nothing else. Tell Mrs. Meltham that this model of a lodger is coming to call on her in two or three days' time—that's to say, when he's broken the neck of all the mares in the county. Goodness help Tramore if all the visitors were like him. And the worst of it is all these vagaries that throw honest people out of their senses is to pick up some young lady who has run away from him or from somebody. So you see it's no wonder for me to call him mad. Why, child, aren't you well? Come in, do.'

The girl roused herself from the stupor that had fallen upon her, and turned mechanically from the sharp eyes.

'No; Mrs. Meltham will be waiting.'

She returned to the house with the bay windows, pausing a moment at the door to collect her thoughts. Some subtle instinct told her that she was the one sought; but did no like perception tell her who was the seeker? Why, who could it be but the man who loved her?

But did he love her so much as that? With all the clinging dependence of her nature, she craved a great strong heart like that to lean against. But was he not a just man? Was it not possible that he was merely come to drag the truth to light? Which was it—love or justice? Hovering between her longing for the one and her fears for the other, she could not decide whether to fly or remain.

But where could she go did she so decide? Where would she get another situation without references? And then might she not after all be only flying from one willing to protect her from all?

But then to stay! Supposing it were but to meet detection? The mere thought sent the blood in a great

surging flood back upon her heart, as though it would have stilled its beating for ever.

Voices in the drawing-room made her pause as she opened the front door. Could it be that Rohan Blennerhasset had gained a sure clue, and had come there straight to meet her?

Powerless, incapable of movement or thought, she stood there till the rustle of a dress, and the sound of voices nearer, warned her that they were coming out. How would he come; as her lover or her judge?

'I am troubling you unnecessarily,' said a clear, ringing voice, to that weary listener full of the silver echoes of a beautiful past. 'I can see the rhododendrons another day.'

'No trouble, I assure you,' said the widow. 'Ah, Kate, are you back? See where the children are, will you.'

'How do you do, Miss L'Estrange?' said the gentleman, coming forward with outstretched hand. 'I am very glad to see you.'

She looked up into the kind face, she touched the strong warm hand, she drank in the kindly tones of the true voice. But alas and alas! it was the face, the hand, the voice, not of the man who had taught her to love him, only of the man who loved her.

'You are acquainted with Miss L'Estrange,' Mrs. Meltham remarked, with no little surprise; 'that is the secret of your enquiries, then?'

'I have that honour,' said Charlie Devereux in a tone that precluded further enquiry.

Would he betray her? Was that grave quiet tone only the perfection of irony, or was it friendship, firm and strong? Once again she raised her beseeching eyes to the

face of Charlie. What did she see there? Trust, perfect unswerving trust; confidence, that like an invigorating cordial gave her fresh life to toil on her weary pilgrimage. There was no need for prayer or promise; he would never betray her. It somehow broke the shock of the disappointment, this conviction.

‘I have much to tell you concerning your friends,’ he whispered, as he stooped to examine one of the hardy winter plants of which Mrs. Meltham was so proud. He could not for the life of him help giving her this assurance; she looked so wan, so weary.

‘I can only wait to hear it on one condition,’ she said, in a low tone. ‘That you give me your word not to write or speak of me to any of your friends.’

‘Surely you don’t think——’

‘Promise. Oh! Mr. Devereux, promise. Do not drive me from this shelter, do not. I am a poor weak coward, I cannot battle with the world; I cannot brave its poverty any more than I can face its censure. And yet, if you refuse me this, I must go forth again, houseless, homeless. Think of that, Mr. Devereux—houseless, homeless.’

‘I give you the promise until you shall yourself release me. That will be when I shall have explained how very anxious they all are to hear of you.’

She bent her head in mute gratitude. She could not bring her white lips to thank him. She could only whisper—

‘I trust your word, remember.’

Enough, surely, to make a man suspicious. Enough to make him not only wonder, but distrust. And yet he neither suspected nor distrusted. Oh! this great, big, generous heart of his; how grand, how noble, how rare a

thing it was. Was that a gift to be trampled under a woman's caprice?

They passed on; and after that Mrs. Meltham took very good care to keep near her visitor till she had time to despatch Kate to the returned West Indians. There was no time for explanations, and that was how Charlie did not keep his promise to Miss Ingram to write her news of Kate the instant he had discovered her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MORE PUZZLES FOR MR. DEVEREUX.

THE beach of Tramore. I suppose most people know what that means. A broad sweep of white sand, some seven miles round, with tiny pink pebbles and yellow sea shells twinkling in the cold wintry sunlight.

How the March wind blows across that beautiful white beach with the pink and yellow shells. How it blusters and blares, though the sun is peeping out, shivering all sense and feeling, except the sense and feeling of pain and cold and misery, out of those trembling, cowering, yellow-skinned children, who wrap their little blue cloth jackets round them so piteously, and make such frantic endeavours to stretch their short skirts or trousers over their little mottled legs, that the short socks imperfectly cover, and that look a good deal more like pairs of sticks than pairs of legs belonging to real live boys and girls.

Poor children! No wonder for them to shiver and

cower before this fierce, angry wind. They have come from a warmer clime, where damp is vapour, and where the breath of the storm king comes rather like the hot passion of a tropical nature than the biting, scathing sarcasms of a frigid one. They are Mrs. Meltham's West Indians; two boys and three girls. They are all dressed pretty much alike. That is to say, all are dressed in blue cloth, and in all trousers and skirts is the same remarkable shortness observable, which leaves between the socks and the upper garments a certain space of mottled surface, devoted to the March wind, very much like a sop to Cerberus.

They go along hand in hand, not even making believe to gather shells, or indulging in any other of those social humbugs which have penetrated to, or emanated from, the nursery. Every little ragged urchin gathering seaweed, every bare-legged, bare-armed, bare-necked little girl was a fresh aggravation to their misery. It made them fancy almost that they had no shoes or socks or jackets either, and they felt so very cold that it was only by looking at them they felt they had them. A little behind these five wretched children, the wind blustered on two people walking side by side. It was the West Indians' governess and Miss Bayley's lodger.

Don't imagine that Miss L'Estrange had escaped, and, above all, escaped to meet a gentleman with a moustache, without the exercise of a little diplomacy. Not at all. Mrs. Meltham was a very proper person to have the care of young ladies, whatever might have been her capabilities with regard to West Indians. Nothing would have induced her to relax her usual rule of being read to, but a quiet hint thrown out by Charlie that he might call in the

early part of the afternoon. This was after several ineffectual attempts to see Kate for explanation, and it resulted in Mrs. Meltham packing the governess away for a walk this blustering day; for she had already observed what looked uncommonly like an understanding between the two young people, and what would the world say if the heir of Devereux contracted a *mésalliance* under her roof? That was how the boisterous wind, tumbling along, came upon a lady and gentleman instead of on a rosy-cheeked nursemaid.

‘Mr. Devereux,’ she said at length, ‘you are very kind, and I thank you, but you have only told me what I partly guessed. I know Miss Ingram’s noble nature so well, that I can well believe she would form the kindest judgment respecting the girl she has befriended for years. Mrs. Chirrup, too; ah! she could not be herself and speak other than kindly of anyone, especially anyone unfortunate.’

‘I may write, then, to relieve their anxiety?’

‘No. So far is what you tell me from shaking my resolution, that it but confirms it. I shall never return, and, what is more, they must never hear from me.’

‘Miss L’Estrange!’ He was perfectly astounded. Enough to make him suspicious, surely. ‘You will not compel me to observe such a hard condition as that? When they are waiting, too, with open arms to receive you?’

‘I know Miss Ingram, how good, how magnanimous she is, and it is just that very nobleness that tells me I must never see her again. Mr. Devereux, don’t imagine I have torn myself from friends so kind, from all that makes life so precious, without a struggle, or from any caprice. I can give you no explanation, though I know how strange

this entreaty for secrecy must appear to you. Distrust me if you must, but do not break your promise.'

'Miss L'Estrange, I never distrusted you, nor do I now.'

She was too agitated and troubled to grasp the full meaning of this assurance, yet it comforted her in some dim, indistinct way.

'You do not retract your promise?'

'No, I cannot do that, but I cannot keep it quietly. I must entreat you till you absolve me from it.'

'Do not,' she said, with a mournful gravity that struck him painfully as an echo of hopelessness. 'It will make my lot harder to bear, but it can effect no other purpose.'

'But there is one subject I must touch on.' It was now Charlie's turn to hesitate, but after a moment he went on bravely—'You will at least let me inform Mr. Blennerhasset of your whereabouts.'

She did not answer. Handsome Charlie stole one glance at the pale, chiselled face, to which the blustering wind brought not one tinge of colour. It smote him like the dead, white face of a corpse done to death by his hand.

'I am a brute, a perfect brute,' he muttered savagely to himself, 'and a mean-spirited one to boot.' Then he spoke aloud in a rapid, decided tone—

'I must not conceal that he has been very anxious about you. He had a right to be, you know. I have been fortunate enough to find you first, but he might have been the lucky one. I may let him know?'

'Not now, Mr. Devereux,' she said in a low tone. Perhaps we shall speak of this again.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHARLIE'S EXPERIMENT.

KATE grew accustomed to seeing Charlie daily. She no longer grew nervous at his approach; she reposed unconsciously in the comfort his presence gave her.

All this time, Charlie, noble, generous, high-spirited Charlie, was making an experiment. A little while ago he had felt no more doubt of the mutual love of two persons than he did of his own existence. Now he had discovered that his estimate of the one was altogether wrong, at any rate as far as impulses went, might it not be that he had mistaken the other with regard to depth of feeling?

He noticed that the pale cheek of the governess grew more wan as the days went by. But this might be caused by other things than the loss of a lover.

Day by day the thought grew that he might claim a right to comfort this poor crushed creature, whose helplessness was a stronger spell than had been her pride of beauty. He could not forget that whatever the unhappy fate that had cut her off from her friends, Blennerhasset had left her to it.

Then there crept into the loyal heart of this man a new thought. Was it right, was it honourable, to steal away another man's betrothed, to take advantage of that man's momentary passion, to use the seeming cruelty and exaction of love to deal him a death-blow, to supplant him as might a coward the stronger, braver warrior?

Once this idea had taken root, Charlie resolved what to do. Rohan Blennerhasset was not a man to be argued with. There was but one course open. Kate must be prevailed upon to see him once at least, and he must contrive some plan by which Blennerhasset might be brought to her. If at a meeting his love showed no sign, Charlie felt he would be justified in believing that it was, as the lawyer had told him, dead.

Just like Charlie was Charlie's plan, overleaping in a reckless fashion obstacles that graver and steadier persons would have spent months, ay, years, in removing, or lose their way getting round. Disregarding all hindrances, he resolved to accomplish what he set about, and he did.

'It can do no good,' Kate had said, but she did not forbid him bringing her face to face with Rohan Blennerhasset. Her heart craved for a kind word from him; a gentle good-bye was all that might pass between them, she knew; but the memory of that would be something to keep in the darkness of the coming years.

Only a good-bye. She knew that now. She knew she had done this upright, honourable man a great wrong ever to have thought of marrying him. She was wiser now, and very thankful that the wisdom in all its bitterness had not come too late.

Perhaps it was only weakness, this wish to see him once again. Very likely; she always had been weak, and she thought she would like to ask him to have kind thoughts of her.

Rohan Blennerhasset was in his chambers when a letter with a country postmark reached him. The direction was in a lady's handwriting, and he looked at it suspiciously, turning it over and over. At length, somewhat

reassured by the angular character of the writing, he opened it.

Who was Mrs. Meltham? Why had she grown so suddenly uneasy as to the stability of the bond between herself and the guardians of the West Indians? That was what he was trying to think, what he thought he was thinking; and all the time a flushed, indignant face danced before his eyes, the angular writing on the unexceptionable paper ran out into bold, stern words: 'How dare you suspect her? Is your friend only to be trusted while she is in your sight?' Words very unlike Mrs. Meltham, not at all suitable to her style of writing; and at last he became conscious of the real state of affairs, and rose impatiently as if to free himself from the vision.

'A flirt, only a flirt, simulating what she cannot feel, merely to attract.'

It is to be presumed that the 'she' thus alluded to was the lady whose letter he still held. But that is really too hard on Mrs. Meltham, who had never deserved such a reputation, much less from a stranger.

He went down to Tramore a few days after, rather for the sake of the distraction than the business. The first person he met there was Charlie Devereux.

'You down here?' he exclaimed, as Charlie greeted him. It was the first time they had met since that stormy passage in the chambers. Still if Charlie was willing to forget it he was.

'So are you,' was Charlie's Jesuitical rejoinder. 'Where do you put up?'

'Anywhere.'

'Better come to my place, Miss Bayley's boarding-house.'

'I'm not come to stay; I almost think a hotel would be better. There's Brady's.'

'Very well. Dine with me this evening. Our *cuisine* is not at all despicable.'

Mr. Blennerhasset assented for want of an excuse. When they met in the evening, Charlie, hypocrite Charlie, mentioned casually that he was acquainted with Mrs. Meltham, and on such a feeler being thrown out, Blennerhasset could not do less than acknowledge that he was come down on business to that lady. When he reached the villa with the bay windows next morning, he was therefore not surprised to see Charlie quite at home in the drawing-room, chatting familiarly with the widow, who rose graciously to receive the celebrated lawyer.

'I am almost ashamed to have troubled you on such a little matter, Mr. Blennerhasset,' she said, with a charming smile. 'Allow me to introduce——'

'No need,' interrupted Charlie; 'we are none of us strangers. I believe I need not introduce you to Miss L'Estrange, Blennerhasset.'

The shock was so sudden, so unexpected, that Blennerhasset might well be pardoned had he for once forfeited his character for imperturbability. For a second it seemed as if he would, as his eye turned on the slight, drooping figure, the beseeching eyes—turned in spite of him, in fact. But in an instant he was self-controlled as ever, with glances for nothing that he did not choose to see. He bowed with perfect politeness, and sitting down near the window, he addressed Mrs. Meltham on ordinary topics.

Kate had been reading to the widow when Mr. Devereux had been announced. She still held the book in her

hand when Blennerhasset came. Mute, and still, and motionless she had sat, waiting for her doom.

And it had come; it was there. Indifference. That was her portion.

Perhaps in all her imaginings a supposition of this had least crossed her mind. Passionate reproaches, stern condemnation, she had prepared for, but not this cold, placid look that told her plainer than words that she was nothing, must ever be nothing to him. With the speed of lightning a conviction flashed through her brain that it had all been a delusion; whether on her side or his, she could not tell; it might be on both, that he had never loved her.

'Miss L'Estrange, will you be good enough to give me those documents you will find in my bureau?' the widow said.

Kate rose mechanically and left the room, the old pain at her heart, the old dull, dead white upon her face. Going up the stairs and coming down she could only think that all the sweet dreams she had dreamt in her loneliness, wherewith she had thought to solace the coming years, were but the idle fantasies of her own imagination; that, such as they were, they were dispelled for ever; they could never come again.

She met Charlie at the foot of the staircase. He looked into her face, and the look that he saw there he never forgot. Instinctively he took the documents she held in her hand, and brought them to Mrs. Meltham himself. When he came out again Kate was gone. He knew this was the hour for the morning perambulations of the unhappy West Indians, and thinking she might have gone

down to the beach to join them, he strolled that way. Why he did so, he could not say, except that he wished, if only by his presence, to comfort her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRIENDS ALWAYS.

A MONTH passed, and Mr. Blennerhasset had been more than once down to Tramore, but without any change in the relations existing between Kate and himself.

‘He has had long enough,’ decided Charlie Devereux; and he no longer sought to spin out the business that brought the Dublin lawyer to the pretty seaside town, or to furnish pretexts for securing Kate’s presence when he knew Blennerhasset would be going to the villa with the bay windows, or to absent himself from the house for days together.

It came upon the lonely girl like a thunder-clap, this sudden generous love of a gallant heart, and she could hardly believe it. When she would have spoken he refused to hear her until she had given the subject some consideration; a week at least, he said. He thought that time might weaken the resolution he saw in her face. It did not, however, it only strengthened it.

That week was spent in involuntary remembrances and comparisons that would come, of coldness and distrust on the one hand, and perfect confidence on the other; of the one rendered freely, and the blind obedience the

other exacted in return for a very patronising sort of affection, that after all had been only Brummagen ware, not even the real article, such as it was. Perhaps no one who has not experienced an equal if not a like mortification to that of a wasted heart can comprehend the revulsion of feeling that came with the conviction that she was prized by a man good and true.

Who shall count the tears of sweetness unutterable, of bitterness unfathomable, that nurtured a decision she would never have had the courage to make in the old days when she had Jenny and Miss Ingram to lean against? Somehow with the necessity for standing alone had come the strength, and she faced calmly a future in which she could not see one solitary gleam of light nearer than that great horizon of immortality that had as yet but a dim, faint glow to her young heart.

‘This your final answer?’

He was leaning on the stile that barred her progress, and there was a nervous movement of the slender brown hand on the broad hat he had taken from his head. Beyond the stile lay the broad beach upon which the restless sea rolled as monotonously and regularly as though there were no human hearts beating out of time; as though there were no slumbering tempests in its own fathomless bosom that should rush out in foam-tipped waves and low mutterings by-and-by, and satiate its passion with the death-song of many a goodly vessel. Inside the low wall the field was green, the grass was soft and thick and luxuriant, the sand and shells lay on the other side of the boundary, heaped up against it in many places. On the grassy side stood Mrs. Meltham’s governess.

“Yes, Mr. Devereux.”

'I knew you couldn't care for a great rough fellow like me,' he said, with stern humility.

'Hush, oh, hush!' she said, with such a thrill of pain in her voice that he had to pause. 'Do not speak like that, and above all to me.'

'Perhaps you think I want to ferret out your secrets? I do not; I want to know nothing.'

'I did not think that,' she said, with a smile beautiful in its confidence. 'I knew you would not ask me a single question; that though I never spoke, you would trust me to my dying day.'

'And yet——'

'And yet I shall never marry, but——'

'But what?'

'I should like you to trust me still, if you think you could.'

'I could not do otherwise. Oh, I have been mad—blind, giving you pain where I meant to give comfort; but I shall never be so mad or so blind as to distrust you. Forget my folly, and only remember that I am your protector till you get a better; your brother and friend always.'

She knew what he thought, but she had not the moral courage to set him right. She had always been a shrinking coward, and she was one now. Perhaps it was better so, perhaps he would be more likely to forget her and her troubles if he nourished the delusion that she still loved Rohan Blennerhasset. And yet she would have liked him to see that she was not so insensible to goodness and devotion; but she could not. It was beyond her: had her life depended upon it she could not have explained.

'Always, always your friend and brother,' he repeated.

She smiled faintly through the tears that rained so freely now, conscious of nothing but the comfort of his words, as she gave him her hand to seal the compact. Then he let her pass through the turnstile, and watched her out of sight under the heavy night shadow of the thick larches.

'She loves him still,' he muttered, and he passed his hands across his brow as if to clear away the doubts that kept him from solving a mighty problem.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MISS JOICE DECLINES TO MAKE HERSELF RIDICULOUS.

STITCHING away as if for dear life, Miss Joice did not hear the step on the stairs until a knock startled her. It was Mr. Dalzell in travelling coat and very muddy boots.

'You bring news, sir?' and the work was put down, and the black eyes fixed searchingly on his face with a strange intentness.

'Yes.'

'Not bad?'

'No, no,' he said hurriedly, to reassure her. 'I am only a little puzzled.'

'You have found Kate?'

'Yes.'

'And she is well?'

'Yes.'

He sat down, and she waited patiently for a time. At last she asked,

'If Kate is well, what is wrong?'

'I don't know; that's what I want to consult you about. I have seen your friend, and she is well; but she gained from me a solemn promise not to indicate her whereabouts to anyone. I got her at last to make an exception in your favour. I believe the argument I used was that I must share the secret with some one.'

'She did not forbid you to tell Miss Ingram?'

'Most particularly.'

The black eyes opened wide now.

'I must see her.'

'That was just what I was about to propose,' he said eagerly.

'How does she look?'


'Unhappy, I fancy.'

'Poor child! Oh, tell me where she is, Mr. Dalzell. You don't know how happy you have made me.'

'I'll tell you on condition that you don't run away without me.'

'Oh, how could I be so ungrateful? Don't tell me if you think that.'

'Don't say ungrateful, child. I don't like the word; say it wouldn't be kind,' he said, with a smile whose patient melancholy shadow she did not see. And yet it was plain enough, Heaven knows, in that attic, that if bare and somewhat draughty was high up enough to catch the glory of the sunset clouds, some of the free fresh air that never could penetrate down into the dingy street. 'Well, I don't think that. I don't imagine you would do anything that was not generous and loyal. Your friend is at Tramore; and if you can start to-morrow or the next day, I will write to an old friend of mine, Miss Bayley, to have rooms ready for you.'



'I'll set out to-morrow morning, and thank you all the same, sir, but you needn't trouble about the rooms. I'm used to looking out for myself, and—I have lots of money.'

She spoke with more acerbity than she usually employed towards Mr. Dalzell.

'I daresay you have. You're just one of those big-hearted people who always have money, for others, at any rate, if not for themselves. But I want you to understand that, as you are about to take a journey to relieve me from a dilemma, I claim the right to direct your affairs.'

'What nonsense! As if I wouldn't go to Kate anywhere and anyhow. No, no, Mr. Dalzell; don't offer me charity—don't. I have two hands to work my way, and charity even from you would kill me.'

The burning eyes, the flushed cheeks, attested the reality of her emotion, and gave startling significance to her words as she repeated——

'It would kill me. The very thought of it suffocates me.'

'I understand,' he said slowly. 'You will not believe that the pleasure you would give me would be tenfold greater than any I could give you, and you shrink from accepting any help that would give me a happiness my money cannot purchase. Well, if you were to marry me, you could not feel it charity.'

A sharp short laugh was Miss Joice's answer to this proposal.

'If we are to be friends, Mr. Dalzell, you are not to make me a laughing-stock again,' she said, with the shrill imperiousness that awed the supers of the Theatre Royal. 'I'll neither make myself or you ridiculous, that's flat. We'll remain as we are, or else enemies.'

He sat silent, thinking what a very ridiculous thing he had done after all. No wonder for her to laugh that bitter, scornful laugh. It was very absurd to be sure. He was roused by the sharp, incisive tones.

‘I’ll start in the morning, Mr. Dalzell.’

‘At least, Jenny, I must insist on writing to Miss Bayley. It is the best place you can stop at; and remember, to have free intercourse with Kate you must be on visiting terms with Mrs. Meltham. That would be impossible, and would render matters awkward for your friend, if you place yourself in a subordinate position.’

‘Yes,’ she said slowly. ‘It might be awkward for Kate, though she’d never think of that. I see; but how, even with your recommendation, am I to keep up the character of a lady? I told you I’m no good at make-believe.’

‘Only be yourself, and you will be all that is necessary,’ he said, delighted to have won her round so far. ‘I shall go and write at once,’ he added hastily; ‘before the post leaves.’

‘And before I rescind my promise, eh? No, don’t be afraid; I’ll not mar your good intentions this time. You see, for my precious lady-bird, to save her annoyance of any kind, I can even stoop to act a sham, and pass myself off on those fine people as a real lady.’

‘And you are one.’

‘No, sir; with only the feelings, and tastes, and desires of one—worse luck for myself—with all these, only a counterfeit, a miserable mockery; and so any man of the world would tell you in five minutes who knew my daily employment.’

‘How much she can love,’ was Robert Dalzell’s re-

flection, as he wound his way down the narrow steep stairs, that broadened a little at the bottom, emerging in the dingy street, whose sights and sounds and clamour affected him no more than if he had been fifty miles away. 'What a wealth of affection she showers on a girl who has once been her companion. What a rich, grand nature it is; one in which a tiny share is to be coveted. Oh, how bountiful is the great mother to some; what a veritable step-dame to others. These two girls have such a mine of wealth between them that having only that they could never be poor. They will have each other, until they have somebody else, to live for; no hiatus in their existence, while mine is a blank with nothing before, nothing after, on this side of the grave. I am forty-three to-day, and I have not one in the wide world who would be the poorer if I dropped out of it to-morrow. My youth! Oh, I gave it for what was not bread. I am rich now, and what good is it? I am old, older than my years; my hair is streaked with grey, my face is seamed with furrows, and my heart with bitter memories. The success has come too late.'

Oh! to how many does it not come too late? See yon millionaire, gouty and lonely and morose. Don't be too hard on his gloomy misanthropy. Had but a little pile from the heap of gold that is now his, but a little, very little, fallen to him thirty years ago, he might have married the tenderly-nurtured girl who emigrated to avoid starvation and died of the hardship. The success he toiled for day by day and night by night came, as it nearly always does to the spell of persistence like that; but it came too late. Don't envy him his money-bags. The grass is green on the old love's grave, but what's worse, the man's heart has grown hardened and tough.

He has no family ties, no generous passion to extend happiness he never knew, nothing in the world but his money-bags. Let him have them. Don't be too hard on that proud woman, who puts down the sneers and frowns of the world with a scornful hand, and treads her own way in spite of them all. Had but a tiny portion of the success that is hers, but a breath of the praise and encouragement they lavish on her corrupt philosophy now, had only a wee small glimmer of sympathy come to her when she wrote by the light of a halfpenny dip in a garret for a moral magazine, when she threw all the freshness of her youth into her writings, while she was yet capable of enjoying the fruits of her labour, while she could revel in the delights of social intercourse, conscious that she ~~was~~ neither old nor ugly nor repelling, she had not emerged into notice a hard embittered woman, whose railing accusations against a divinely ordained destiny are so many stumbling-blocks in the way of weaker travellers.

But the man should not grow hardened, you will say. He should have preserved the greenness of his memories in spite of years of loneliness. He should have opened out his heart to the poor, and gladdened his own heart with the joy of others. He should have taken a delight in showering upon others what he might never actually taste himself, and be satisfied. The woman should not have grown bitter and rebellious. She should have reconciled herself to the wisdom of a decree beyond her understanding, that consigned her to loneliness, and gave others happy homes, and friends, and fortune, and consideration, and respect. Should not? Great Heaven! how many of us do the things we should? Is there a more finished satire in the whole English language on human nature

than that one little word? I do not contend that that man was justified in shutting his heart to his fellow creatures because he himself was denied happiness, in refusing that which he might have had because he could not obtain that which he would. I only say that he was a man, with the faults and follies of his nature, and above which so few, so very few, can soar. I do not plead for the right of that woman to indulge in rebellion because her lot was exceptional. I only tell you that her lot was exceptional, her nature not; nothing but poor human nature like yours, if you would but own it.

Yes, success had come to Robert Dalzell, but his youth was fled. There was something indescribably sad in his attitude as he paused for a moment, loth, perhaps, to enter the busier thoroughfares. The sunset glory had faded out of the dingy street, if, indeed, it had ever reached so far down there; the grey twilight enwrapped the lonely man, and he knew it. He felt it chilling him to the bone, for he knew he should not emerge from it to the light of a home fireside. It was not the shadow of a night that was settling down upon him, it was the shadow of a life.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS JOICE IN A NEW CHARACTER.

It might be thought from Miss Joice's prompt decision not to make herself ridiculous that she would not be likely to trouble herself much with a subject she had so cavalierly dismissed.

Unfortunately it would not drop out of her life and be as though it had never been, this sentence against herself. It brought before her all the more forcibly how very absurd it would be for her ever to entertain any idea of a life different to that she now led, or to be the chief in any household larger than her own, composed of herself and her canary. It reminded her very painfully how very unattractive she was. It drew her by some unhappy fascination to a small glass with the seam across, before which she would stand in bitter mockery of herself and her power to please. It haunted her in the railway carriage, where the simple demand from the ticket porter for her ticket seemed an insolent sneer at her travelling first class, where the merest civilities of a fellow passenger seemed the most refined irony on her assumption of the style of ordinary womanhood. It required a look now and then at Robert Dalzell's grave dignified brow to assure her that the source of this bitterness towards herself was really charity, benevolence, not a malevolent desire to draw her out for after amusement.

'Any luggage, miss?'

She stared at the man in a bewildered sort of way. She had been called miss before by her comrades, for politeness is practised to a degree amongst Irish arabs that would astonish many very elegant circles in England. But the officials of a railway station had always some strange connection with police, and for one of them to address her in this fashion seemed nothing at all short of sarcasm.

'No, nothing,' Mr. Dalzell replied for her.

'Cab, miss?'

Mr. Dalzell had left her to secure a small carpet bag

he had forgotten, and this time the speaker touched his hat. Instead of answering she looked slowly down at her dress. Could that be the cause of this deference ?

She had profited by Mr. Dalzell's hint so far as to purchase a very neat travelling costume of grey. Only for Kate would she have parted with the little black frock and scarlet ribbon that was never new and never very old, but always seemed the same. When she looked up the cabman was gone, and she was tempted to believe the whole thing a dream.

' Well, if ever a woman had such lodgers as I have,' was Miss Bayley's soliloquy an hour afterwards. ' If she's not a witch I'd swear she's own sister to one. Take care of her for a week ? I wonder in how many places at a time would Mr. Dalzell like me to be ? I only hope she won't throw the evil eye on the house. I'm blest—but there she's off again across the beach ; I wonder when she'll stop ? '

All that day—Mr. Dalzell being out—Miss Bayley was kept in a perpetual ferment by the strange vagaries of the young lady whom she was to take care of. Now her notions of taking care of that species of animal just described was to keep her safely immured in a grim parlour, where there were no mirrors to tempt to an inordinate vanity, no easy chairs to induce habits of idleness, no flowery fantasies on the walls to lead the thoughts astray from the stern lines of marble block pattern. But as Miss Joice did not take to the cage of her own free will, Miss Bayley was sorely puzzled how to get her into it ; whether to wheedle her with sugary lures, or take her by the shoulders and thrust her bodily into her proper place, not to mention passing doubts as to keeping her

there. After a day of this martyrdom she resolved upon taking the elf to task.

'When I was a young girl, Miss Joice,' she began sharply, 'it was not the custom for young ladies to run about like wild cats, here now, there again.'

'What a long time ago that must have been. Fashions have changed since then, I'm sure.'

'Perhaps they have, but not for the better.'

'Well, that's a matter of taste. But what put it into your head to call me a young lady?'

'Upon my word I don't know, except politeness. You'd do for the grandmother just as well as Red Riding Hood. What *are* you?'

'I hardly know what I am now,' and the elf's voice took a strangely plaintive tone, 'but I know I was a woman years and years ago. Whether I have grown young or am in my second childhood I don't know.'

'And I'm blest if anyone else does. Perhaps you'd like a book.'

'No; still if it's the proper thing to do I'll sit still, only it must be out in the sun, if you please. I feel so much better there, and I'm always good when I'm happy.'

Miss Bayley placed her in a garden chair full in view of the pantry window. There Jenny sat for a time; but there was that in her aspect that did not permit Miss Bayley to feel at all sure that she would not disappear at any moment, and leave her to answer all Mr. Dalzell's inquiries. Jenny was, in fact, wondering why she was not to go in and out, and use her eyes and her feet to some purpose; at the same time, if this restraint was necessary not to compromise Kate, she would submit to it. Then her thought strayed or rather reverted to the trouble that

had been so sorely brought home to her of late. The clang of the dinner bell startled her, and Miss Bayley, who had that moment come to have an eye on her, as she expressed it, saw her suddenly start away at full speed, it might be to the town, it might be right into the sea, or it might be just round to the front entrance. A tiny figure flying up the stairs somewhat reassured her; but then how long would she stay up there? One comfort, Mr. Dalzell had said he would be back to dinner at the latest, and then she would wash her hands of all responsibility.

Jenny's room was a pretty, airy apartment facing the sea. It had white hangings edged with knitted fringe, and lacy curtains, as had every bedroom in the house, and these same lacy curtains and knitted fringes were the pride of Miss Bayley's heart. It had also a tall mirror, and to this Jenny went straight, after flinging the window wide open, and peered into its depths as though her sole business had been to examine it.

A little pinched nose, two great staring black eyes, a gaunt, sallow face without a bit of colour, a queer little mouth with pale lips, and black hair that fell in heavy damp masses now.

'Oh, how ugly I am.'

The tears rained down as she stood there till the image in the glass was blotted from her view, and still she uttered that exceeding bitter cry coming from a woman's heart—

'O, how ugly, how ugly I am.'

Who prates about beauty being only skin deep? I tell you it is one of the greatest and most glorious gifts of the Deity to man. Heaven help the woman who has not, or cannot fancy she has, some little share of it. I say fancy, because it sometimes creates it.

She stood there till the second bell sounded. She had no toilet to make, nothing to do but to brush her hair into a fiercely shining smoothness, and then rub her eyes dry savagely as she demanded who would look at her to see if her eyes were red or not.

There were not more than half-a-dozen people in the room when she entered. She looked at them with the insolence a great misery gives some women. Their judgment could be nothing to her, for she had already condemned herself, and they immediately set her down as a West Indian heiress. So much for humility. Mr. Dalzell came towards her.

‘We are to call on Mrs. Meltham to-morrow,’ he whispered. ‘Your friend expects you, and Mrs. Meltham is aware of it, so that there will be no necessity for secrecy.’

She smiled, and the expression of joy transformed her into something so radiant that Miss Bayley was more puzzled than ever. ‘Is she a woman, or a child, or a witch? Which is it?’ she pondered. ‘A little of all three, I’m thinking.’

‘How can I thank you, sir?’

‘No, don’t, Jenny,’ he said, passing his hand through his grey locks with a weary sigh.

‘Oh, you don’t know what you have done in giving me back my Kate. You have made me happy, so happy.’

She did not exaggerate. The present overtopped past and future, as it frequently does in a nature like hers, else how should ardent, passionate souls drag out their span? Their threads of light are sometimes so few and far between, if they could not ignore the surrounding blackness they would be incapable of wresting hope and courage from these transient gleams. The prospect of seeing her

friend, of fathoming the new trouble that had come over her, shut out the face of that cruel mirror upstairs.

‘Oh, my dear, my dear, have I found you at last?’ she said, when she found herself out in the trim garden with Kate. ‘Why did you leave me? What was it? How was it?’

‘Ah! Jenny, I did it for the best.’

‘Of course you did, but it was a very bad best all the same. To think that you shouldn’t trust me.’

‘Oh, Jenny, don’t say that. You don’t mean it. Not trust you!’

‘What am I to mean, then?’

‘That I thought by coming away from you all to save you trouble.’

‘As if any trouble or annoyance could be equal to anxiety about you. Don’t be so considerate again, my dear, unless you want to kill me. Now tell me your trouble, that is if you think it will comfort you to confide in me.’

‘Jenny, I have but you in the world; don’t be cross with me.’

‘And who have I but you? There’s the trouble, for how will it be when you are married? I have the worst of the bargain.’

‘I shall never marry, Jenny.’

‘Do you mean to say you’re going to forbid my letting Mr. Blennerhasset know where you are?’

‘It’s not needful, dear. He knew long ago.’

‘He knew?’

‘Yes.’

‘And he came to you?’

‘Yes.’

The gleaming dark eyes were dilated as the little creature whispered breathlessly—

‘And it is all right?’

‘Yes, it is all right. We are still all in all to each other, you and I.’

‘Why? Oh, my dear, why? I thought he loved you.’

‘I thought so, too, once. Perhaps he did after a fashion of his own; but I was not fitted to retain that liking. It is better as it is.’

Jenny was too stunned to reply. They walked up and down the broad trim walk, conscious that every movement was visible to those in the drawing-room.

‘Tell me everything now, Kate.’

‘I had better begin with why I left Ingram.’

‘Yes.’

Half an hour passed in earnest conversation; explanation and deprecation on Kate’s side, scolding and admiration very queerly mixed on Jenny’s.

‘Then you had no quarrel with that man?’

‘No; but don’t speak slightly of him.’

‘No, of course not. I wonder what he suspected you of?’

‘Nothing but secrecy, I think. That was bad enough in his eyes.’

‘Oh, dear, oh, dear. And to think she should love this man.’

‘Why?—Eh?—Yes, it’s Jenny.’

Miss Joice turned sharply round, and confronted Mr. Devereux.

‘How do you do, Miss Joice?’ he said, holding out his hand.

‘I am glad to see you, Mr. Devereux,’ she said, with a

frank confidence he had never noticed before. 'You see I have found Kate without your help.'

'And I am heartily glad of it,' he responded. 'I dared not let you know, but I was always hoping you'd come.'

They entered the drawing-room together, and Mrs. Meltham placed Jenny in a chair where the light would fall full on her, and where she would be able to examine her thoroughly.

'Pray, Mr. Dalzell, do you ever take your ward as a model?' she asked of the celebrated painter, who in all guilelessness had led her to suppose that Jenny was an heiress, and he her guardian, by simply offering no explanation of her presence with him.

'Not exactly. I have taken the liberty of introducing her face into one of my paintings.'

Jenny turned round upon him.

'What did you do that for, Mr. Dalzell?'

'I wanted your likeness.'

'Oh, I thought it was to point a moral or adorn a tale.'

'Then you were not aware of acting as model,' said Mrs. Meltham.

'No.'

'Perhaps I have led to awkward disclosures.'

'Not at all,' said Jenny, almost arrogantly, as she surveyed the fishy eyes that twinkled over the prospect of drawing her out. 'Mr. Dalzell is just the one person privileged to make me as ridiculous as he likes. I wouldn't advise anyone else to try it.'

'How rich she must be to talk so insolently,' was Mrs. Meltham's envious reflection. 'I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you often during your stay here, Miss Joice.'

‘Yes, you may rest easy on that score, if it’s any pleasure to you. I shall want to see Kate pretty often,’ was the not very civil reply. Some subtle instinct told her that this woman, who now smiled so sweetly at her impertinences, would have trampled her without mercy had she only an idea of who she was. The very suspicion stimulated Jenny to see how much she would suffer from her.

‘I shall like to see how much insolence you will bear from me. How you will look when you discover who it is that bearded you in your den,’ was the reflection that gave such a mocking mirth to her eye, such scathing bitterness to her tongue.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHARLIE DEVEREUX AND MISS JOICE GROW FRIENDLY.

‘You have not succeeded in inducing Miss L’Estrange to communicate with my cousin?’

‘No, Mr. Devereux,’ said Jenny, sadly. ‘It is utterly impossible. It would drive her to seek fresh shelter, she says, and—I am disposed to agree with her.’

‘You are?’ he exclaimed in surprise.

‘Yes,’ and still she spoke in the same very sad tone.

‘I do not see how it can be otherwise; but it is very hard.’

‘What is?’

‘That some must sacrifice themselves to others.’

‘But why, why must it be so?’ he asked, eagerly.

‘Because I do not see how it can be helped.’

They paced the beach, firm and hard after the receding tide.

‘What will you say to my cousin, Jenny?’

‘What could I say? I cannot face her.’

‘You will stay here, then?’

‘I’m not sure; but wherever Kate is I must be near her.’

‘I wish—it’s a comfort to me to talk the thing over to you. May I?’

‘Of course you may, Mr. Devereux. I don’t say that it won’t be a comfort to me too.’

‘Well, then, could we devise any scheme by which Miss L’Estrange might be restored to her former position at Ingram? It is desirable for many reasons.’

‘None,’ said Miss Joice; ‘but, Mr. Devereux, don’t think ill of Kate for that. If you do, you will never forgive yourself.’

‘There is no danger, Jenny. I know Kate, although I don’t know much about her.’

‘How I hate that man,’ she exclaimed, a little irrelevantly it would seem, yet he understood her perfectly.

‘Don’t say that,’ he said very gravely. ‘I believe, I hope he is an honourable man. It is his haughty temperament that causes him to seem unjust.’

‘Oh!’

‘Don’t form a bad opinion of him till you know him better.’

‘That will be never. I know him as well as I want to. I did not know that he was your friend.’

‘Not my friend so much as your friend’s friend. That is why I would not have you disparage him.’

'It is all over between them,' she said sharply, though there was interrogation in the tones.

'I hope not.'

'Why do you hope so?' she demanded angrily. 'He is not worthy of her. He is unjust, unreasonable, suspicious.'

'No, he is not worthy of her,' he said, with sudden passion. 'He is unjust, unreasonable, suspicious, cruelly so; but what of that? she loves him, therefore he is better than all the world to her.'

'She could not love him, believing all that?'

'And how would you make her believe it, and to what end would you if you could? To tell her of his perfidy would but break her heart.'

'You are wrong, I tell you.'

'Oh, I have not made my experiments for nothing. She loves him, and it rests with him to make her happy. Evil betide him if he does not.'

'What do you mean, Mr. Devereux?' she asked, and there was something of fear in her tone.

'I mean this, that if he sports with her happiness, if he renders her miserable, I will show that these things, though beyond the law, are not to be done with impunity,' he answered fiercely.

She quailed before the demon of wrath she had a moment before been anxious to raise.

'You would not do anything rash? If only for Kate's sake.'

'Be easy; I shall always think of her. Is not that why I cautioned you against disparaging him to her? Oh, Jenny, it would all be right if we could get her back to

Ingram, for as the matter stands, he is suspicious, he is distrustful, but yet he is everything good to her.'

They walked on in silence for a time, turning to and fro so as never to wander very far from Miss Bayley's establishment. She did not interrupt his moody meditations, till suddenly he addressed her.

'It's funny, isn't it, that you should be the one to whom I turn for comfort in my trouble?'

'Yes, it is strange,' she said, humbly.

'I don't know why, or what claim I have upon you, except that you seem best able to understand my wants. Or it is the truth—yes, it is the truth of your nature that attracts me; and yet I should like to feel that I had some right to burden you with my worries and vexations, that you would let me regard you as a friend.'

'You have that right already,' she said; 'it will be as great a boon to me as it can be to you.'

'And you will help me to be strong as you helped Flossy long ago. You will aid me to act a man's part, to do the best possible for one whose life happiness may be wrecked by a chance word.'

'At least I will put no more stumbling-blocks in your way,' she replied, and a flood of pity looked out of the dark eyes that had watched him in the cholera ward. A great deal of that pity was for him, a great deal for Kate, blind Kate, but there was a little for herself, for the witch who would never have the chance of throwing away such a noble heart, but none, no, not a particle, for that man who watched the earnest talkers from Miss Bayley's sitting-room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOO LATE, GENTLEMEN.

MRS. MELTHAM was not a little startled one fine morning to see a four-horse post-chaise draw up at her door with a jerk that sent the steaming animals almost on their haunches. As she was not dressed she could not go down without some delay, and Miss L'Estrange, who was already in the dining-room, had all the advantage.

A gentleman alighted from the chaise ere it was well stopped, and walked up the gravelled walk with a step that crunched the pebbles into powder, and after knocking loudly pushed open the door himself. At the same moment another dashed up in a cab, and confronted the first comer in the hall.

'You here? Why I only this moment got your telegram,' he exclaimed, breathlessly.

'I came express; I want to see Miss L'Estrange at once,' added Mr. Blennerhasset to the servant. 'Where is she?'

The man, too bewildered for speech, opened the door of the breakfast-room.

'First,' said Charlie Devereux, 'what does it all mean?'

'I'll tell you together;' and he strode into the dining-room, slamming the door as soon as Charlie was in. He then turned towards Miss L'Estrange. She had risen, and came to meet them, her eyes deeper, her face paler, with a prescience of coming evil. For the first time hesitation

was visible in Mr. Blennerhasset's manner; he paused, because he really did not know how to begin. She was the first to speak.

'Something has happened, Mr. Blennerhasset?'

'Yes, explain,' said Charlie impatiently. 'This is all I know about the business,' and he handed a crumpled paper to Kate. It was evidently a telegram, and consisted of a few words—

'Get your friend away at once. Lose not a moment. R. B.'

Kate quietly folded the paper that passionate Charlie had so sadly crushed, and at last Blennerhasset spoke, his voice growing more firm, more lawyer-like as he proceeded.

'The detectives are even now on their way here. The affair at Ingram has been discovered.'

She did not know what his words meant, but she knew that to her they might mean anything. Therefore it was that her voice failed her, that lip and cheek and brow took that ashen hue they tell us is the livery of guilt. Finding she made no comment, Blennerhasset went on—

'They will be here very soon, but there is a post-chaise. Come at once.'

'What is it?' she managed to whisper.

There was compassion as well as sternness in his tone as he asked,

'Must I explain?'

'Yes.'

'Lady Devereux accused a servant at Ingram of having stolen her diamond bracelet. The girl to save herself has implicated you.'

'And you dare to repeat such an insult?' interposed Charlie. Blennerhasset glanced at him, then turned to Kate.

‘Miss L’Estrange, I am a lawyer. I am accustomed to deal with desperate cases. Will you tell me, before Mr. Devereux, who is so willing to saddle me with gratuitous suspicion, whether I would have even a shadow of right to defend you?’

She cowered at the thought of that stooping form that like a flash came before her. And an innocent woman had been suffering all this time. A shiver was her only reply to the lawyer’s question.

‘Then as you do not think you can face inquiry, there is no better plan than the one I have formed for your escape.’

‘Oh! Mr. Blennerhasset,’ she exclaimed suddenly, in tones of heart-broken agony that he never forgot, ‘what have I done for the time you have known me, what has been my conduct, that you should put this theft upon me? Oh, you are very suspicious.’

‘I only judge you by your own words, your own acts.’

‘True, true,’ and she shivered under the pity and condemnation of his tone.

‘But I don’t judge you by your words,’ and stern and calm Charlie Devereux stood by her side; ‘nor by acts, save those I understand. I judge you by yourself, and I will stand by you now and always in the face of the world.’

‘Will you tell me to maintain your innocence?’ demanded Blennerhasset, almost passionately.

‘I cannot,’ she moaned. ‘No innocent person must suffer through me. My lot has come to me; I must accept it.’

‘Do you accuse me still?’ and he turned to Charlie. ‘You hear these words?’

‘Yes, I hear,’ said Charlie passionately, ‘and I tell you

that if my eyes had seen her do the act I would still disbelieve my senses, and believe only in her.'

Even in that hour of supreme misery she smiled the gratitude of a broken heart that thrilled to the voice of so gallant a defender. It was a smile Charlie never forgot, never wished to see again on any human face—a smile that wrung his heart to the core by its sublime resignation.

'I am ready, but not to escape,' she said, rising and addressing Mr. Blennerhasset. 'I will await the police here.'

'You are mad!' he exclaimed, moved out of all the usual grooves of retributive justice by the sight of the sad, suffering face. 'You must go. I have arranged everything. You cannot, no, you cannot face a common prison.'

'At the same time any risk in this affair must be mine,' said Charlie Devereux, in a tone of calm decision. But Kate shook her head in the weary fashion of long ago, and fixed her sad eyes on the lawyer.

'You will understand, Mr. Blennerhasset, you, who are so just, that another must not suffer in my stead. I will remain and make what reparation I can.'

'No, no, you must go. Perhaps it is not just, but I cannot help it.'

'It is hardly just that you should have to act the part of a fugitive even for a time,' said Charlie; 'but you must yield to circumstances. Blennerhasset, I do not scruple to use your post-chaise, but you understand that you are in no way compromised—no, I will not suffer it. On me the blame or the glory.'

'It is too late, gentlemen,' said a detective, throwing open the folding-door between the two rooms. 'I arrest Kate L'Estrange on a charge of theft.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SHE IS MY DAUGHTER.

THE round tower near the brickfield at Dromore was still tenanted by Balfe. It was a place subject to periodical visits from the police, and therefore the safest place in Dromore. Balfe somehow had a clinging regard for the crazy building, and never failed to return to it, though what its attraction might be few could tell.

Perhaps it was its loneliness. Perhaps it was some relief to this man, who was very bad, and who knew that he might have been very good, to sit away from those who would never be as bad as he was any more than they would rise to the goodness he might have attained. Perhaps their puny sins and petty meannesses chafed his spirit, and seemed to him a very little to secure for the condemnation that he never doubted would follow, and he despised their craven hopes of a Heaven they would not seek, their fears of a hell they did not scruple to earn.

Perhaps the lonely ground-floor had its associations. Perhaps in the steady glare of the sods of turf he heaped upon the hearth he saw a pale, patient face. Certain it was that he never sat brooding long till his thoughts reverted to a time long ago, when a child's sweet eyes and plaintive voice had pierced the hate in which he had steeled his heart, and made a breach in his vow of revenge that he had never been able to make good since. Then upon the face of the child came the age in youth that he had brought there. Yes, he. Was it not well? Was it not part of his

plan? Why should it strike him painfully now? Was it because she had been so good to him? Ah! that was it. But what right had she to be good to him, to render a daughter's love in return for demoniac hate, to wind herself round him so as to rob him of the sweetness of his revenge? Who had taught her?

Yes, that was the burden of his song, day and night; who had taught her? It was the echo of his complaint against the innate goodness he had never foreseen; and even while he demanded by what right she had robbed him of his revenge, he knew that he was craving still to have her for his daughter, his very own. No, he could not give her up to his enemy. Not yet. He must for a little longer feel that he can call her daughter, even though it is a fiction transparent to both of them. Something might happen. Lord Ingram might die. Kate could then be righted. She would be lost to him a little more than she was now, but she would not be given to another.

More than ever was she in his thoughts since that last visit to Ingram.

'Keep the secret still,' she had said, 'if only for that poor old man's sake. I know you have been sinned against as well as sinning. I am content to have you for a father still; I will always think of you as such if you will spare him this last humiliation to his grey hairs.'

'Oh, if I could only restore her without gladdening him, how soon I would do it,' he muttered savagely; 'but I can't, just because it would kill her to think she was a disgrace to him. And yet she bears it patiently enough when it comes only on her. Who taught her?'

His eye fell on a damp packet. It was the *Evening Mail*, dropped there by the lithe gossoon whose business it was

that Balfe should have his news first. He generally knew the items before they were seized by hungry reporters, but it occasionally amused him to see their versions, and now and then proved instructive. Since he had had his arm shattered in an encounter with the Dublin police, he had found it very necessary to be informed not only of facts, but how these facts were viewed. A paragraph with a great many capitals attracted his attention.

‘It is not a little astonishing to find that the daring theft of Lady Devereux’s diamond bracelet, hitherto laid to the charge of Balfe the robber, has in reality been committed by a young lady known as Kate L’Estrange, and who is now in custody. The prisoner, when brought before the magistrate, refused to give any explanation, and she awaits her trial in gaol, Mr. Carsons refusing to accept bail.’

What had caused Lady Devereux to break the promise she had given, a promise on which he had calculated. though he had not heard it with his ears? Was it that her dread of this girl who had taken her son’s heart, who had drawn him to Tramore, was greater than her pity? He had not thought of that, and yet why did he shrink from the picture of his enemy’s daughter in a gaol? Was it not the place he had destined for her? But even as he uttered the savage thought there came the touch of that pitying hand on him, even on him, the sound of that plaintive voice in his ears:

‘Poor father. Yes, I will call you father, if you wish it. Who am I that I should judge you? You have sinned, but you have also suffered.’

No, no, no; she was not Lord Ingram’s daughter; she was the child he had reared.

He flung the paper from him, and strode out. He did

not heed the crackling turf, the draughty door that swung as of old on its hinges, as he went forth never to return. What though the flare of the burning of the one haunt, never desecrated since the Otter's death by the companionship of a human being, coloured the murky sky; he never turned to look, he never came to gaze on its blackened ashes.

The telegraph clerks were used to strange visitors, used to see queer things without allowing any mark of surprise to disfigure their immaculate conception and realisation of insouciance. Yet somehow they found themselves looking with something like interest at the tall stern man who wore his right arm in a sling, whose heavy great-coat would have been respectable on anyone else, but whose eyes glared so villainously that the best bred clerk there felt constrained to put on an appearance of that vulgar article, politeness. Perhaps, too, they looked a little curiously at the message addressed to Lord Ingram, the proudest man in all Ireland. It ran as follows:—

‘I promised to restore you your daughter when her education was finished. The time has come. Be at the Red Lion, Sandimount Road, at nine to-morrow.’

Leaving the telegraph office he visited the various resorts. At each place he gave some instructions as though he were going on a long journey, a thing of no infrequent occurrence. It was his absence down in the north that had prevented him hearing sooner of Kate. By the time this was accomplished, and a short sleep snatched at one of his haunts, it was time to set out for Sandimount Road.

The old fever had returned of late, and whether from bad surgery or recent injuries his arm was excessively painful, and the close air of the place in which he had

passed the chief portion of the night had almost stifled him.

Life, strength, seemed to return to his veins as he breathed the fresh air again. It might be fever that lent him such sudden strength; he did not heed or care; he was bent on reaching a certain place, and he would do it.

The Red Lion was a very respectable hostelry; one of those places where Balfe the robber was known only by name. The man who stood behind the bar stared hard at the visitor who asked if Lord Ingram had arrived yet. It was not often such a tramp, so stern, so powerfully built, with such ferocity in his deep-set eyes, came openly to that part.

‘His lordship came just a while ago,’ he answered after a moment. ‘I say, my man, where are you going to?’ and he put himself in the way.

‘What a precious lot of fools you all are,’ said Balfe, scornfully; ‘yourself and the flunkeys. D’ye think I’d have come so far without knowing how to get in?’

The master of the Red Lion was a tall, powerfully-built countryman, and he measured his strength with that of the intruder.

‘That’s the parlour, isn’t it——’

‘Just so, and my missis don’t have visitors of your sort there. You’ll have to go where ye came from, unless ye’re minded to tell your name and your business.’

‘My name and business?’ echoed the tramp scornfully. ‘Much ye’d thank me if I did. Out of my way,’ and as he spoke he put the man aside with his uninjured arm. ‘Out of my way, I tell you. Little good ever befell them that crossed the path of Balfe the robber.’

The burly countryman fell back and crossed himself as

the tramp strode past. Then he went behind the counter and took down his gun.

Opening the door of the best parlour, Balfe found himself face to face with Lord Ingram.

‘You are punctual, my lord.’

For a moment they stood, each taking note of the other. Time had not dealt gently with either. The haughty aristocrat was bent and worn; lines seamed his face as though he had been ever so lowly born; his hair was no longer iron grey but white, his delicately chiselled features pinched. He still preserved the unalienable stamp of gentleman, but his pride of birth and place had vanished from his bearing as from his possessions. His personal pride was all that was left, and that rose in arms at sight of the man who had injured him so terribly; a proud man yet, despite his sorrow, his blanched hair, his hollow cheeks, he faced his enemy, and all the hate of years leaped out into his eyes.

The tramp was a worthy enemy, even of that proud peer. There was in his attitude, in his gloomy eyes, in his haggard face, a something utterly defiant and implacable, proclaiming him a sinner of no ordinary type. Magnificently grand in his great woe, superbly scornful he stood with his wounded arm thrust in the sling, his chest heaving with all those emotions of hate and revenge that had stirred him for the last fifteen years, and which were now to be practically ejected. Ejected for what? For the feeling a girl had inspired him with by the grandeur of her nature; a feeling he could not explain except by fancying it was a mixture of remorse for wrong suffered by the innocent, and admiration for a great suffering bravely borne. There was a touch, ay, and not a narrow, but a broad and bold one, of the heroic in the man, fallen, degraded as he was, and

the thought of a weak girl suffering in his stead stirred all that was good within him. Lord Ingram was the first to speak.

‘What do you come for? Good or evil?’

The tramp laughed insolently. The sight of his enemy roused his passions beyond control.

‘Good or evil?’ he repeated derisively. ‘Which do you expect? Am I one of the aristocracy?’

‘Have you no mercy?’ ejaculated the peer, with a suppressed groan.

‘Mercy? Bah! Isn’t my blood too common to know such a feeling? Am I not one of the rabble, one of the base born, incapable of good; a thief not only bred but born, debased through all the generations that have gone before? What good do you want from me? Don’t shrink or cringe or protest, my lord; isn’t it your own creed I’m uttering, the creed you burnt into my flesh with the convict’s brand, the creed my child’s lost soul shrieks every hour of the day, of the night, from the hell it thrust her into?’

Great drops stood on the pale forehead of the nobleman, and he put up his hands as if to shut out the horrid spectacle conjured by the frenzied words.

‘Don’t,’ he implored feebly. ‘My sin has been great, but so is my punishment.’

He sank in the chair and the tramp eyed him sternly. The pain of his fractured arm blanched his cheek, but like a giant he crushed his pain and gave no sign. Lord Ingram roused himself.

‘This is the day you promised me my daughter, this is the place appointed.’ There was fear, pain, desire, as well as hate, in his voice.

‘Well I’ll keep my word—if you desire it. But first you shall have your choice.’

‘If I desire it?’

‘Before I give her up, you had better ponder, perhaps, on what her life with me has been, what she is likely to have imbibed, the little liking she can have learnt for you, your ways, or your sort.’

‘She is my daughter.’

‘She was convicted of burglary when she was fourteen. Think how she has graduated since. Think of her school, think of her teacher.’

‘She is my daughter. Miserable child, to suffer for the sins of a father.’

‘My child suffered for mine, why not yours? But I have no desire to thrust her on you. She has no wish to come; the life she has had these years suits her better than the one you would lead her.’

‘She is my daughter. She will come to me.’

‘What, debased and wretched?’

‘Debased, wretched, a thousand times; is she not my daughter?’

‘You claim her in spite of all? Is your courage so great that a daughter will compensate for disgrace?’

‘I have no courage. I am a poor broken old man, with nothing left but a craving for the touch of my child’s hand, a sound of my child’s voice before I die.’

‘Then come.’

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A REVELATION FOR MR. BLENNERHASSET.

‘AND you suspected her, Mr. Blennerhasset, you suspected her!’ exclaimed Miss Ingram passionately. She had hurried to town on receipt of a telegram from Jenny, and found the elf and the lawyer at her house in town.

‘You must own that circumstances were greatly against her,’ he said quietly.

‘Don’t talk to me of circumstances,’ she interrupted, ‘but tell me that you are ready to go down on your knees, and ask pardon for every evil thought you have had of her. Do you want to know why she left Ingram so mysteriously, why she avoided me in particular? I will tell you. She had discovered that she was the lawful heiress of the house; her motive was worthy of her, it was to leave me in possession, and to save her father what she thought would be the disgrace of owning her, her—to whom nothing can cling but honour and nobleness.’

Blennerhasset stood stupefied, stunned, as it seldom was his fortune to be. Scarcely less amazed Jenny rose from the low chair in which she had been resting wearily, forgetting fatigue in the excitement.

‘Oh, Miss Ingram!’ she exclaimed, with tears in her eyes, ‘Is it really true? Is my Kate the true heiress?’

‘The true heiress, Jenny Joice, and who so fit to grace the station?’

‘Thanks to you,’ returned Jenny enthusiastically. ‘It was for this, then, you sought us out in the hospital, that

you might make her by education and habit what she always was by nature, a perfect lady. Oh, Miss Ingram, it was a plan worthy of you, it was a grand scheme.'

So this was what the plotting had been for, this was the conspiracy he had suspected and reasoned out to a most logical but most ignoble conclusion. Mr. Blennerhasset was almost blinded by the astounding revelation. So much for reasoning. What a fool he had been.

'And it will all come right now, will it not?' Jenny continued, anxiously. 'They cannot touch Lord Ingram's daughter, can they?'

'It must come right,' said Miss Ingram, resolutely. 'My hands are free now. That man declared, when I expressed my determination to restore her to her father without delay, that he would render me powerless, and he did. Lord Ingram gave me no courage to proceed in the face of such a threat. Each time I sounded him I found as much pride as sorrow, and so I waited on. Now I can wait no longer, and I am right glad of it. My uncle must receive his daughter without delay, and unless he is devoid of all sense, he will not associate her with disgrace, were twenty charges preferred against her.'

Rohan Blennerhasset paced the room up and down as if oblivious of his companions. At last he stopped before Miss Ingram. She had sunk on a low sofa.

'Miss Ingram, would it be possible for you to forgive one who had misjudged you?'

'I have done so long ago,' she said, not without bitterness.

'You detected my suspicions.'

'Oh, yes, Mr. Blennerhasset, it did not need words to tell that you regarded me as the perfidious usurper of

another's heritage. I saw it all, and yet, though I was a frivolous girl, you might have trusted me. There is such a thing as common honesty, even amongst those who think that to be happy is no sin.'

'I have been an egregious fool. At least you will forgive me?'

'What can my forgiveness matter?' she said, with irrepressible weariness. 'Your offence to me can be but trifling. It is different with my cousin; you should not have distrusted one whom you loved.'

'I never loved her, only you, and you know it.'

She sat like one in a stupor, heedless of how time went, or what had become of Jenny. It might have been an hour, it might have been three, or it might be only a minute he stood there motionless. Then his voice seemed to break a silence vast and awful.

'I had not distrusted her if I had loved her. You know that I loved you, always you. Will you not even say you believe me?' he demanded, hoarsely.

'You distrusted me,' she said, in a strangely harsh tone.

'And so have lost you!' he exclaimed bitterly. 'Oh, I am well punished for my presumption, for my wilful bondage to reason, my obstinate refusal to obey the instincts of my heart. This is what reason has led me to.'

The voice died away into the awful majestic silence. Slowly, but very slowly, the outer world dawned on her vision, a clearer conception came to her of where she was, of the fact that Rohan Blennerhasset still stood before her.

'Have I forfeited your esteem for ever, Miss Ingram? Is there no forgiveness for an offence that was in itself a torture? Oh, there was a wide difference between misjudging you and distrusting your cousin. The latter I

accepted as the sequel to indisputable argument, the other I rebelled against with all my strength, though it seemed as logical as the other. Don't couple the two together. I ceased to think of her when I fancied my estimate wrong; I loved you best when I doubted you most.'

She rose suddenly from the sofa; her eyes flashed, her cheek crimsoned, but her voice was cold, almost stern.

'You forget yourself and me when you utter these words. I tell you once again, a misapprehension between strangers does not require any very great forgiveness. Go to my cousin, seek her pardon, and remember that she may not be as ready to break her given word as you seem to be.'

She swept past him haughtily as she spoke. This was a pull up with a vengeance. It was the coquette, the frivolous butterfly, who reminded him of the engagement he had forgotten, who told him in unmistakeable terms that he, a man almost as good as married, and a barrister, was making a very pretty idiot of himself.

'Was it not broken?' he muttered, as he still paced up and down. 'Did we not part as strangers?'

But then came the reflection that the parting had been the ostensible result of a mystery which was now revealed. He was still bound as though there had been no disagreement. Bound to one who indeed was as noble as he had ever thought her, but without the consoling reflection that the flashing eyes, the defiant smile, the merry witchery that came between him and his betrothed were but the arts of a siren, the wiles of an unprincipled woman of the world.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOW THE LAST WITNESS PROVED HIS WORDS.

EVERY eye in that vast assembly was turned on the prisoner. What was the entrance of a peer of the realm at the moment when they had under their notice a girl, beautiful, young, a lady in every movement and motion, accused of a common theft? Lord Ingram and his strange companion forced their way through the dense throng, until, by dint of an amazing exercise of imperious strength on the part of Balfe, they stood near the dock.

The prisoner was already in court, and something like a thrill of admiration crossed the tramp's stern face at the sight of this girl, who, weak, vacillating in many respects, excessively timid by nature, rendered more so by the peculiarity of her early life, yet kept her secret from those stern inquisitors, ay, and what required more bravery, from those true friends. The unnatural paleness induced by terror gave her a marvellous statuesque beauty that suited well her faultless profile. Lord Ingram tottered now that the struggle for a place was over. The terrible fear that had come to him when the barred windows of the court loomed before his carriage was sickening him now with unutterable agony. It was terrible, terrible to be there, but he would not have gone away for worlds. A secret instinct drew his eyes to the prisoner, and he could not remove them. Suddenly he started forward with an irresistible longing to comfort that desolate girl, but a strong hand held him back. Like a wild animal he turned

and glared at his detainer ; the veins in his forehead stood out like cords, and he raised his white, jewelled hand as though he would have struck his enemy to the earth.

‘ You ! ’ he hissed. ‘ You to stop me ! Must I not even publish my shame till you do it for me ? ’

‘ Bide my time, bide my time, I tell you. ’

Slowly, reluctantly he fell back into his place, heedless of the fact that he, the aristocrat of aristocrats, who in his insolence of place and station had out-Heroded Herod and outstripped the most arrogant of his compeers, was shoulder to shoulder with the plebeian he had not counted of the same clay. Not so Balfe. He was preternaturally alive to the fact that the lord of Ingram was crushed against him bodily and spiritually. It soothed his fierce pride, it told him his vengeance was accomplished.

Neither of these two men took their eyes off the prisoner whose trial was beginning. A solemn hush pervaded the court as the question was asked, ‘ guilty or not guilty ? ’

There was no answer till the question had been repeated. Then tremulous, yet distinct, came the words,

‘ Not guilty. ’

A breath like a sigh of relief passed over the vast assembly. ‘ Is she failing ? ’ queried Balfe, curiously.

The case for the prosecution having been stated, the defence was called. There was none.

There was indeed a counsel in the shape of the cleverest lawyer in Ireland, beside whom stood a young soldier with crosses on his breast. There were also some witnesses got together at incredible trouble, but not one of them had a single statement to make that could be called a defence of the crime charged. All they had to say, all they could

tell about, was the character borne by the accused, and that they dwelt upon with strange tenderness, until the audience had portrayed before them, by consecutive utterances, the history of a girl moved by pity for the suffering of her kind, risking her life to soothe some; never very brave, never very strong, yet doing deeds that the bravest and the strongest might shrink from. It was like an old fairy tale this story; something, too, like one of those grand old poems that expatiate on a theme now exploded, heroic endurance, evil overcome by good, great suffering nobly borne working out marvellous results.

Lord Ingram made no effort to move now, he was spell-bound, with only consciousness to dread an awakening. Was it of his daughter they spoke? Was it for that poor, unhappy outcast, generous voices rang through that crowded court, laden with praise and honour the highest that can be given? Was it her name that flashed in the glorious record unfolded by Miss Ingram, by Robert Dalzell, by the tiny black-eyed creature who poured out her whole soul in indignation against those who could suspect the girl whom she had known from infancy of aught but goodness, by that gallant, fearless soldier who brought up the rear?

‘This is, however, irrelevant,’ remarked the counsel for the prosecution. ‘There is no actual denial of the guilt of the prisoner, much less proof of innocence.’

‘Irrelevant?’ retorted Charlie Devereux, his eyes lighting with indignation. ‘No actual denial? Why, what denial can be more substantial than the plain testimony of so many people as to the spotless integrity and moral worth of the accused? It is not irrelevant, and it is an actual denial of guilt—ay, and proof of innocence; the strongest, most positive that could be adduced. It is a

‘thousand times more conclusive than the best attested alibi.’

‘If there is no further evidence—’

‘There is further evidence,’ interposed the counsel for the defence, in his calm, measured tones.

It was Dr. Dalzell who stepped into the witness-box. The burly, beetle-browed doctor of St. Anne’s Hospital flourished a large red silk handkerchief, like a flag of victory, with which he occasionally wiped some troublesome dust out of his eyes. Some of that same troublesome dust had evidently got into his throat, for there was a huskiness now and then in his stentorian voice, only to be removed by vigorous coughing.

‘It’s a queer thing,’ he began, ‘that some people have no eyes. No, nor ears for the matter of that. We know there’s innocent people hanged every assizes by these splendid courts of justice; but was there no one you could pitch upon to swell the list of criminal cases, and give the lawyers work, besides one of the little nurses of St. Anne’s, the girl who braved the cholera, and wiped the death-damp from many a poor creature’s forehead, never knowing but her own turn might come next? I suppose some of you are troubled with short memories, but I daresay there’s a few here recollect Kate Balfe and Jenny Joice.’

A thrill ran through the court at the sound of names unknown to few there.

‘Many’s the day it’ll take me to forget,’ said a voice from the upper part of the court. It was a bronzed sailor who spoke, with all the genuine heartiness of a true salt. ‘It’s a bad opinion of myself I’d have the day I’d not think of the kind hand, the brave heart, that nursed me through

an awful disease. Who ever said she stole a bracelet? It's a lie.'

'You've about hit it, whoever you are,' said Dr. Dalzell, with the profound irreverence for the court that had distinguished his previous speech. 'It's just a lie, and what's more, a lie that no one but a fool could be blinded by. A girl who dares a fearful death by day and night out of pure pity, doesn't grow up to sell her soul for a shining wrist-band.'

A confused murmur rose from every part of that vast assembly; exclamations of pity and admiration, warnings to judge and jury not to injure the cholera nurse, mingled defiantly with the cries of 'order,' 'silence in the court,' increasing in direct proportion to the vehemence of the crier, until it swelled into a monstrous clamour. A variation in the shape of a tremendous cheer shook the roof, as Dr. Dalzell took up his position next to Jenny, stretching out his hand to Kate. She gave him hers mechanically, and a faint smile trembled on her lips, but she could not tell why he stood there, why she sat so still, why the hundred voices, by some strange contradiction, sounded in her ears, and at the same time seemed so far away, like the rushing of the ocean that you hear in the sea-shell. Was it of her they spoke? Or was it some strange delusion? It must surely be a mistake. How could she, who had always been a poor, weak-spirited creature, receive the acclamations of a multitude?

Some subtle instinct told the excited throng that the sprite who now pressed to Kate Balfe, as though to protect her, was the same who had stood by her in her noble work.

'Long live the nurses of the cholera! Heaven's light

be their darkness! May the spirits they comforted shield them from every sorrow!' were the cries that accompanied the names.

Plebeian and patrician, alike brought up, alike generous and unselfish, they stood together now as they had done through life, and who shall tell the difference between them? Who shall decide whether to award the palm to the high-spirited, dauntless nature, throwing out all its amazing courage and fire in its struggle after good; or the one destitute of that boldness, that magnificent courage, that high spirit, yet capable of a sublime endurance?

From out the murmur of the court, the confused cry of sympathy and pity, rose a voice, not clear, not calm, but solemn and impressive despite its faltering, that hushed for a time all other sounds. It was the voice of the judge charging the jury.

There were tears in his eyes as he spoke, there were tears in his voice too, for he was a man with a human heart that swelled high to the echo of deeds of heroism, that throbbed responsively to the suffering of one all guiltless. Yes, all guiltless he felt her to be, and yet he had not a single thing to remind the jury of that could absolve that young girl from the charge legally proved against her.

No longer able to refrain, Lord Ingram pushed his way to the front, to the dock, to the prisoner. He stretched out his hand to his daughter, grasping hers, and so he stood, heedless of the gaping throng. With a return of all his ancient dignity, and much of his haughty pride, he faced the crowd. No longer stooped and bent, he towered to his full height, never prouder than now, when he was too proud to fear what the world might pronounce disgrace.

Never as now had the superb pride of his illustrious ancestors gleamed in his blue eyes, setting at naught, refusing to acknowledge, any judgment but its own, flinging aside as gratuitous impertinence the opinion of all outsiders. As if following his aristocratic companion's example, the tramp too pressed forward, and breaking the hush that followed the judge's speech, his sonorous mocking voice vibrated to the farthest corner of the building.

'My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, before you take any further proceedings, I too have a charge to make.'

This was not the time.

'Oh, yes,' the tramp said, very coolly. 'Lord Ingram is as good a lawyer as any of you, and he'll tell you a better time couldn't be chosen, I'll be bound. Mustn't a public lie be publicly denied? And where so many ears and eyes together as here? Now I accuse one Balfe of the crime laid to this young girl's charge, and I aver that she is innocent of the slightest knowledge of the bracelet, or of any complicity with the said Balfe.'

There was a comical element of the ludicrous in the mixture of reckless disdain and lawyer-like precision of the measured terms he used, and he smiled grimly at the startling effect produced by the repetition of a name so famous. Ay, smiled, though it seemed his own death-warrant he was sounding.

'What, Balfe the robber?'

'Oh, I didn't say Balfe the robber,' and again the grim smile baffled the lawyers. 'I said one Balfe.'

'Father to the prisoner, Kate Balfe?'

'Oh, no,' and the face of the tramp was impenetrable.

'Tis n't likely I'd go and accuse Lord Ingram, of Ingram Place, of stealing a paltry bracelet. The earl of Hell knows

it's not needed, that he's sure enough of him without such little sins as that.'

Lord Ingram! The sensation was at its height, and equalled in intensity the famous one of four years ago. A convulsive shudder passed through the frame of the prisoner. As she leant forward she suddenly comprehended that this man, by a revelation of his identity, had come to doom himself to a speedy death. And after that speedy death to that man of crime? In that awful moment it seemed a little thing to bear a temporary punishment, to let him have a little time to repent. A flood of illimitable pity, glorious, divine, swept over that heart so easily moved by others' woes, nerved that coward spirit, illuminated that pale face with a sublime radiance. With a sudden effort she leant forward, whispering,

'I have borne it so far—I can bear it to the end.'

He heard her. Low as were the words he caught them, and turned to her. A strange light was in his eye, a strange longing look, that might have been the silent cry of a spirit not wholly lost for the immortality that was its portion.

'You are sorry for me?' he said, with a strange mixture of wonder and reverence.

'Yes.'

'I have wronged you; you will have your revenge.'

'No; save yourself while you may. It is better I should bear a little than that you should die. I tell you I want no revenge.'

'Wait—wait till you have tasted it. It is food for the gods. I have drunk deeply, deeply, and I tell you there is no draught like it.'

His voice rang through the court now as he turned to the judge and jury.

‘My lord, and gentlemen, let me tell you a story; it won’t take very long.’

‘Does it bear upon the case in hand?’

‘I leave that to you. A clever gentleman like yourself doesn’t want the moral picked out for him.’

Not a breath interrupted him as he went on, addressing the throng as much as the Court.

‘Fifteen years ago this Balfé had a daughter. She was the only thing he had to love, the only sinless being who would touch his hand. And yet he wasn’t all bad then. If he stole, he did it that she might never know the want of stealing. Well, well—the parsons would tell you that that wasn’t the way, that his sin found him out. Well; maybe so; generally speaking it does find the poor out. The man was a convict for two years, and when he came back his daughter was in prison. She was the child of a thief; who would employ her? She was amongst her father’s friends; was it any wonder she was driven to steal? Had she been more expert she might have escaped; but she was taken up for her first crime, and a just judge ordained that she should finish her education at the hulks; ay, though the miserable father prayed on bended knee for the soul of his child. Oh, and when that wretched man implored for mercy that might avert all like misery to his judge, with what haughty scorn he flung back the insinuation that one of his race could ever be sullied by crime. It was in the blood of the poor man’s girl to sin, that nobleman said; it could never happen to one of his name. That was what he said—it was the blood. What need to tell you all the scathing, cruel words with which he seared

a bleeding heart? That was the gist of it—it was in the blood. The bereaved father was struck with a curious idea, that made life seem worth having a little longer, though he had lost all of good it had held. He determined to put the noble lord's words to the test, and try whether patrician blood would be a bar to all the curses of poverty. He wasn't a man to let ideas run to seed. He took the little lady, and brought her up in the midst of filth, squalor, misery, such as the poor know. The Thieves' Latin was her nursery, the scum of a city her teachers, the spawn of vice her playmates. What good would you have from her?'

He paused: not a breath disturbed the perfect stillness of the place. From that stern, rigid man whose blue veins stood out like cords upon his ashen forehead, whose hand clutched the prisoner's as with a death grip, to the idiest stranger, all listened motionless, entranced.

'Just four years ago this Balfe restored Lord Ingram his daughter, after she had been convicted of theft. But not that my lord might keep her; oh, no. His daughter wasn't restored to him after her trial, that he might blot the crime off her young soul. No, she was sent to the hulks, that it might be branded there; so you see it was necessary for his plan that my lord's heiress should be transported too. He promised that at the end of her first term her noble father might have her back; that would be about three years hence, when she has expiated the crime of which she now stands accused.'

'Accused, but not guilty,' broke in the clear, assured voice of Charlie Devereux.

'Well, my lord, and gentlemen, don't you think it ~~was~~ a fine experiment? So it was; ~~only~~ it failed.'

A suppressed sob convulsed the audience at this announcement.

‘Yes, it failed; and all through a very simple little thing. Nothing more nor less than the pity felt by a girl very poor and very miserable for those who were worse than herself. It wound itself round that bad man’s heart—that wonderful pity; it reminded him of a story a mother had told him long ago, and that, though it could never be of use to him now, was still very beautiful, very grand. It moved him, this beautiful pity, to be content with ruining her in the sight of the world, leaving the soul free; it caused him to bring her as a prisoner for a crime she never committed, that the peer might taste somewhat of the bitterness he had drunk to the dregs. He let her go back to her lordly father, to see what sort of a welcome she would meet. And what do you think it was? My lord knew that she was his daughter, he thought he knew that she was a blot upon his house, and he let her run away. He did not turn her off, oh, no; he only let her run away, out into the pelting rain and wind, with no shelter but her rags. She made him the offer, poor child! she told him she would go away and not disgrace him; and he accepted it. And that other man—if his daughter had come back to him from hell itself he would have welcomed her with outstretched arms. But she never did; there was the trouble, she never did.’

An ominous gloom was stealing over the stern visage, till with a sudden effort he shook it off, and turned, so that he should not see his enemy. For crushed, disgraced in the eyes of a few, Lord Ingram grasped a blessing he would never touch, and the thought made him very bitter.

‘Well, he let her go, and when Balfe found her again

she was one of the cholera nurses. Ah! it was a brave-sight to see that little girl; he didn't think her a coward after that, he didn't call himself a fool for letting her steal into his heart and rob him of his revenge. He determined to let her alone, to do her no wrong save keeping her from her place till her father was dead, that his heart might never be gladdened. But—ah, well, it wasn't to be. Her cousin, Miss Ingram, Baroness that was to be, came and took her out of his hands and made a lady of her. Balfe knew why she was doing it, he knew she'd try to get the better of him; but he told her she shouldn't. He only gave up the girl to her on condition that she'd never reveal her to Lord Ingram till he begged for his child as Balfe would beg for his. But a little while ago my lord came back from his foreign travels, and Miss Ingram threw the father and daughter together. It awoke whatever little good was in the hard heart, and Balfe knew it was all up unless he checkmated that clever young lady. So he fastened another crime on that young girl. You see he knew her so well; he knew she would never tell, he knew she would bear the censure, ay, the punishment if need were, rather than betray the reprobate she had once called father.'

'Scoundrel, infamous scoundrel!'

'Ay; wasn't he all that, Mr. Devereux? Sure, if it's anyone has the right to say that it's you; but will you tell me, was he much worse than that fine gentleman yonder, who pleads the young lady's case so eloquently now that he knows all the facts, but who knew Kate Ingram for near a year, and at the end suspected her of a common theft? Balfe was a scoundrel, as you say, but he wasn't such a fool as that comes to. Well, my lord, when

Balfe put a bar to Miss Ingram's plans, he didn't exactly calculate on sending her cousin to Botany Bay, and when he found she was taken, he gave me leave to come here and show how she is innocent, and to put all the blame on him.'

A still and solemn hush reigned as he ceased, then the grave, practical voice of the counsel was heard, at first like a far-off sound, but gradually drawing nearer, coming home to the senses of the hearers.

'This is a story, as you say; but the law demands proofs.'

There was not one there, save Lord Ingram and the three young girls, who suspected who the witness was. They judged from his appearance that he was a confederate of the man he accused, and expectation, intense anxiety, kept every nerve on the strain. What if all this fine story should go for so much rhodomontade? What if it were to end or seem to end like so much clap-trap, as it must if there were no proofs forthcoming? And what proofs were likely to be available when it was Balfe, slippery, oily Balfe, of European notoriety, who was the delinquent?

'Well, let me see, what would you regard as proof? I told you it was Balfe who committed both thefts, but I don't believe he was such a fool as to do it in presence of witnesses.'

'Produce the guilty man if you would have your improbable tale gain credence. Bring this Balfe here.'

'Oh, that's easy enough,' was the audaciously cool rejoinder. 'I'm Balfe; and when I tell you that, I believe you'll take my word for it.'

So Balfe the robber was caught at last. An electric shock passed through the court, galvanising all the lately

listening statues into convulsive life. Every neck was stretched and turned and wriggled to the very verge of dislocation. Squints innumerable were the results of frantic endeavours to get a glimpse of the daring robber who had been too slippery for the cleverest of them; who had braved the terrors of the law all these years, and who now literally gave himself up. There was something silly and foolish in the faces of the turnkeys and the court officials as they secured the terrible offender. So startling was the effect of the surprise that it was not until he was safely in custody that the wild yells and mingled shouts of the audience proclaimed their cognisance of the event that had taken place. Then the tumult was deafening. Execrations were crossed with expressions of the passionate admiration an Irish mob always entertains for great daring and skilful evasion of the law, and it would have been very hard for a looker-on to decide whether it was the supreme pleasure of the crowd to tear Balfie to pieces or to chair him through the city.

'Hurrah for the nurses of the cholera hospital!' came clear and distinct over the hubbub. It stilled the tumult, and then a wild prolonged cheer resounded through the court. Again and yet again it was taken up, till the multitude outside caught it up and filled the streets with the shout, though they knew not why they did so. It is recorded, too—though it may be but slander—that the ermined lords of the Bench waved their wigs in default of hats; but certain it is they were found all awry when peace was restored. Certain, too, is it that judge and jury, to a man, rose as the group, consisting of the Ingram family, with Jenny Joice and Charlie Devereux, left the

court-house by a little side-door that opened into an ante-room.

Kate had not spoken since addressing Balfe. She walked feebly between Lord Ingram and Charlie, looking at nobody, heeding nothing, till the old man stood humbly before her.

‘Kate, my child, can you forgive me?’

A faint, beautiful smile of wonder parted the pale lips, but she did not speak.

‘Oh, Kate, my dear, my dear, don’t look like that! Oh, why didn’t they come before? Mavourneen, my only one, speak to me.’

It was Jenny Joice who pushed them aside, father, friend, even Miss Ingram, yielding the right claimed by the tiny creature, as she wound her arms round her companion and drew the cold cheek to hers.

‘Kate, Kate, I have no one but you, I never had. Oh, merciful Heaven, is it too late?’

The wild cry thrilled the hearts of the listeners, even to stern, self-contained Rohan Blennerhasset, but Kate made no sign. The statuesque features resting against Jenny’s only grew more peaceful, the slender hands fell listlessly down.

They wheeled a low couch close to Jenny, and pressed round to relieve her of her burden, but she waved them passionately away.

‘Stand back, all of you. She was all the world to me, she was nothing to you but a stranger to be doubted and suspected. I will do for my poor girl what is to be done.’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BRINGING HOME THE HEIRESS.

THE servants in Merrion Square were all ranged in the great hall. The news had spread like wildfire—the heiress was found, and they were marshalled to welcome her. Yet, somehow, a hush fell upon them as they watched and waited. It stopped their merry gossip, their wild surmises, their speculative curiosity. It deepened into a strange gloom as the time passed, and still they did not come, though the messengers from the court-house had ceased to pass by, and no more news came.

‘I’ll go and see what they’re about,’ old Vyse said at last. He was the oldest servant there; he remembered well the lost baby, he had carried her in his arms on rare occasions; so they yielded to him, though everyone would have liked to be the messenger, being only kept in leash by the authority of the portly housekeeper, who, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, did both together.

‘Yes, you go, Mr. Vyse,’ she said, with what was intended to be dignified calm and was only undignified emotion. ‘You have the best right to see our young lady. Everybody else stay here to receive her as my lord’s daughter should be received in her own house.’

So Mr. Vyse went, strangely confusing the past with the present, and not quite sure whether he would have to make a low bow to the prattling infant, or place a full-grown young lady in a perambulator. Shooting athwart these confusions came the faintly seen outline of a ragged

child. What had she to do with it? The old man could not tell. He had been called a bright lad in his time, but his white hairs had not cleared his brain, and this sudden shock was too much for him.

The crowd were nothing like dispersed, but the murmurs that reached the aged butler told him nothing. Some indefinable feeling prevented him asking tidings; he thought he should hardly like his young lady's name bandied about by these people. He found his way to the side-room where he learnt Lord Ingram was, but the outer entrance to that would have been blocked up had it not been for the strenuous efforts of two policemen. Vyse, having whispered who he was, was permitted to come a little nearer the door than the rest of the crowd.

'Ye'd better not go in,' the policeman whispered in a tone of friendly caution; 'they mayn't like it.'

Only just found and hovering between life and death. A choking sensation filled the old man's throat as he stood on the step and looked through the slightly open door into the room. It opened wider, and almost unconsciously the old man found himself within the threshold.

On a low couch, almost in the middle of the room, was what might have been the wraith of his dead lady whom he had served so faithfully and so well. So like her—only more wan, more sad, than she had looked in her coffin. One little hand lay on the breast, the other was held in the grasp of a beetle-browed man who frowned terribly on the blue-veined lids, but who neither spoke nor moved any more than a two-eyed Polyphemus turned to stone. Kneeling at the opposite side of the couch, her great eyes fixed with agonising intensity on the beetle-browed visage, was a little black-robed figure. Now and then she placed handker-

chiefs, wet with aromatic vinegar, on the forehead of that motionless figure. Beside her, yet only in the second place, stood Lord Ingram, while his niece behind Miss Joice watched with equal anxiety. At a little distance stood the two young men, and not for a moment even did their eyes leave that group by the sofa.

A carriage drove slowly, almost noiselessly, to the door. Almost at the same moment a man entered from the court, and whispered something to Lord Ingram. A spasm of mortal agony convulsed the rigid features into life, but no vestige of colour relieved their ashen hue as he listened. He paused for a few seconds; not once did his gaze wander from that still figure lying there. Then he said, but still without turning his head,

‘Let him come.’

It might have been minutes rolled out into terrible hours, it might have been hours of suffering condensed into moments of intense agony. Nobody there could tell which it was, so long and yet so short did the time seem, when a man manacled and guarded entered with his keepers. He walked straight to the foot of the couch, followed closely, of course by his guards, and stood there very quietly, very silently.

Perhaps there was an additional glare under Dr. Dalzell's beetle brows, perhaps there was an additional shade of whiteness on Lord Ingram's face, perhaps there was an additional pang of bitterness in the voiceless cry that came up from the depths of the little nurse's mournful eyes, but they gave no other sign that they marked his presence.

‘We will move her now, my lord,’ Dr. Dalzell said in a whisper like subdued thunder. Miss Ingram and Jenny wrapped warm rugs round the unconscious girl, then stood

aside to make way for Charlie Devereux, who lifted the light form into the carriage, into the tender care of weeping Mrs. Chirrup. He had stepped forward as one who had a right to do her this service, and no one, not Blennerhasset, not even the gruff old doctor, had disputed it with him.

He stood by the window when he came in, addressing no one. Blennerhasset and Lord Ingram were still there, waiting like himself for a conveyance. The tramp and his guards had not gone yet, and the peer did not dismiss them.

Charlie Devereux was looking out, seeing nothing, battling with the storm within. It broke forth, that pent-in storm, and with redoubled fury for having been restrained so long, and as he crossed the room to where the tramp stood, the bleak light of that winter day revealed the ghastly pallor of his face, the insufferable light of his eyes.

'You, you have done this,' he hissed, in tones hoarse and low. 'You have done her to death. Others helped you, but of you will I exact the most terrible account. A life for a life.'

'Go on, Mr. Devereux,' said the tramp, in strangely calm tones that had no passion in them, but grief. 'Reville me as you will, strike me if you like. You trusted her, you never doubted, whoever else did. If any man has a right to bring me to an account, it's you. If they'd been all your sort, she wouldn't have had such a bad time of it among the lot of us. And all for no fault of hers—for her father's sin and mine. Your friend, Mr. Blennerhasset, there, had a hand in driving the steel in deeper.'

Charlie turned from him with bitter passion.

'Oh, they all helped. We can trust now, but it is too late. Oh, my lord, and you, Rohan Blennerhasset, ask pardon of Heaven for every cruel thought you have had of one of whom we were not worthy.'

'Charlie'—and Blennerhasset stretched out his hand,—
'believe me, your indignation cannot be greater than my remorse. I would give all I have to atone for my unjust suspicions.'

There was a frank, manly regret in the tone that would have touched Charlie's heart at any other moment, but he was very bitter now, for his sorrow was hard to bear.

'It is too late to atone,' he answered, passionately. 'I can believe you are sorry, but your regret will not undo the wrong, your remorse will not give back the months of misery that crowned her life of suffering.'

'Charlie, I acknowledge I have proved a poor friend beside you. As you say, I can do nothing now, only say I am sorry,' Blennerhasset observed, with a strange absence of his customary hauteur.

'And much good that will do,' sneered the tramp. 'Why couldn't you believe in goodness when you saw it? You are gentlemen all three of you, and used to such luxuries, yet only one of you could recognise it, without its trappings of gold and rank, when it was before your eyes; while I, an outcast, steeped in sin, guessed what it was.'

Lord Ingram for the first time turned to the robber, speaking in short gasps,

'I have good cause to hate you, but perhaps I have something to thank you for too—'

'You have nothing to thank me for,' interrupted the tramp, haughtily. 'Lord Ingram, if I hated you before, I

'hate you worse now. If I could have restored her to honour and happiness without doing the same by you, if there had been one grain of selfishness in her nature that would have let her rest contented while you were in disgrace, I would have found some way to marry her to an honourable gentleman without letting you hear her praises to-day. If I could have done it, you would have gone down to your lordly tomb, as I shall go to my felon's grave, weeping for a child hopelessly lost.'

There was an indescribable pathos in the last few words. The swarthy cheek paled, the cavernous eyes glowed like living coals. He stood for a moment silent, despairing, then shook himself suddenly, as if to fling from him the dejection he despised. There was a fierce majesty in his reckless mien as he turned on his heel, pointing with his manacled hand to the door.

'Come on, my men ; I am ready.'

'Stay,' the white-haired nobleman whispered, with a sudden effort. 'You have given me back my daughter. I forgive you all these terrible years. Escape while yet you may. I will hold these men scatheless.'

'Escape from here ? Owe my life to you ? There are five of you, and if I had chosen to escape you could not have prevented me. Remember that I owe you nothing but undying hate. Remember, too, that should you lose your daughter you are again my lawful prey. Then less than ever can pity find place in my heart, for you have had a happiness I can never have ; you have been spared a pang I shall endure to all eternity. No one can ever take from you the knowledge that your child was unpolluted. The tears you might drop on your grave could never be purched by a breath from the pit. I shall never know the

joy you have had to-day; I shall never forgive you for having had it. My lord, I warn you, help my judges to hang me high and safe while you have the chance, for if I live to see your daughter dead, I will hunt you down like a mad dog.'

There was an uncompromising hatred in his scowl that made the flesh of his auditors creep. Then, with a smile of mocking derision, he left the room with the turnkeys.

The carriage was already at the door, and the three gentlemen entered it, ordering the coachman to drive quickly. He pulled up with a sudden jerk as he neared the mansion, for that other carriage had gone but slowly, and had only now stopped. Old Vyse was there beforehand, and stood with his white head bared holding open the carriage door while his young mistress was carried in. It seemed very awful to the puzzled domestics to see this almost inanimate body carried through their midst, to see their own Miss Flossy follow hand in hand with a wee mite whose only care was not to lose sight of that burden so carefully born by the doctor of St. Anne's. Still more sad was it to see that white-haired old man enter, with bowed head and bowed spirit, heedless of the pitying looks of his domestics, wondering whether he had brought his daughter home to die.

They placed the newly-found heiress in the room that had been her mother's, and Miss Ingram and Jenny Joice installed themselves as nurses, Mrs. Chirrup acting as superintendent. The servants, still with that strange, solemn hush that had fallen upon them that morning, moved about scarcely daring to speculate above their breath on the sad bringing home of the heiress.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ONLY SO HAPPY.

THEY brought her round by slow degrees from the verge of the grave. The brain fever that had supervened was followed by a complete prostration. But never surely had patient more faithful nurses than the two young girls who would permit no hireling's hand to minister to Kate Ingram, or perform those kindly offices one woman receives from another.

It was a great day at Ingram when the heiress was moved from Dublin to the Place. Once in the free blithe country, bursting out in all the ecstasy of spring, her recovery would be more rapid. Rohan Blennerhasset and Charlie Devereux seemed to pass the chief part of their time on the line, for they were up and down between Ingram and Dublin almost every day.

Perhaps Charlie Devereux had been too sanguine, perhaps he was just a little impatient, but it seemed to him that Kate did not get well as quickly as she ought to have done. He began to fancy too that Blennerhasset's visits grew more constrained. Some recollection, perhaps, of that time at Tramore induced him to take Jenny into his confidence.

'We must manage somehow, Jenny, you know,' he said, gravely. 'It won't do to let her break her heart for Rohan Blennerhasset's confounded pride.'

Miss Joice looked up at Charlie thoughtfully. It was some time before she spoke, and then the words came slowly,

dallying in the interlaced branches of the great trees overhead.

‘Do you really think she loves him, Mr. Devereux?’

‘I know it.’

‘I have not found it out all these months.’

‘Let us not speculate on anything so fallacious as that,’ he said, with an earnestness that warned her of the danger of raising false hopes. ‘Remember, I made my experiment. Advise me, Jenny, I am her cousin; have I not a right to open the eyes of that man?’

‘Not that way, Mr. Devereux, we will do better,’ she said, after another pause. ‘Ask your cousin to invite him here for Easter. If his suspicion was the result of his nature, and from no lack of love, matters will right themselves. If otherwise it is as well my poor darling should break her heart before marriage as after.’

‘Ah, Jenny, but do you not understand? Love throws a glamour over what is, transforming it into what ought to be. He is cold, distrustful, suspicious, but he is all goodness to her because she loves him.’

‘And I tell you, Mr. Devereux,’ she went on in the same slow measured tones, ‘that of all the wrongs you can do a woman, the worst is to marry her to a man who does not love her.’

Miss Ingram was not astonished at the request Charlie preferred, with a queer sense of how callous he must be getting to other people’s suffering. She looked up in his face with a kindly quiet smile.

‘I was thinking of that, Charlie. Kate is strong enough to bear company now, and all she wants is rousing. We will make the place alive this Easter, and I shall constitute you my master of the ceremonies.’

Miss Ingram kept her word, and speedily a choice company was gathered at Ingram. Something like a well-bred buzz of admiration ran through the newly-arrived guests as the two Miss Ingrams entered the drawing-room before dinner. Miss Joice, much against her will, accompanied them. It was the first day she had dined with the family, and now only in obedience to the imperious mandate of Miss Ingram, who had suddenly displayed herself as a tyrant of the first water.

‘While you were my head nurse I obeyed you in everything, now that you are my guest you must obey me,’ said this despotic blonde beauty, who had regained, as if by magic, all her old wilful gaiety. ‘You are my guest, Jenny, dear Jenny Joy, for you see I have not yet abdicated in favour of this lazy young lady.’

‘No, nor must you ever,’ said Kate, with deep earnestness. ‘I couldn’t bear it; it robs me of all my happiness.’

Beatrice Ingram laughed merrily.

‘Ah, Kate, you don’t know what fun life is to me. Do you know I have had sorrows in my time? Jenny, dear Jenny knows that, and yet when the mood is on me I can extract mirth out of misery. It is on me just now. I have a reckless sort of idea that I would not give the delicious amusement I am likely to have when I meet my old lovers in an altered position for the life-long happiness I once craved for.’

‘And that I robbed you of?’

‘No, my dear. Never have that idea. I robbed myself of it; my position, my fortune, had nothing to do with it. Ah, no, I, and I only, was the spoiler of my own happiness, and were I to have grown trebly rich instead of a little poorer I could not have won it back. But why so serious?’

and she laughed with the merriment of the mad fit that was on her. 'This care sits very lightly on me just now, and I can think of nothing but the *recherché* entertainment I have prepared for myself. What would I take to forego it? I can hardly tell.'

Jenny gladly accepted the chair placed for her by Charlie Devereux in the alcove, and with the thoughtfulness that ever distinguished him, Charlie took a seat beside her, and commenced chatting, so that any sense of loneliness the elf might feel among so many strangers wore off, until, arriving at that happy state when she was unconscious that there was such a person as herself, she was at liberty to enjoy the scene around to the full.

Kate was sitting beside one of the magnates of the land, Lord Dunderhead, a suave, courtly, harmless old gentleman, who paid rapid compliments in a deliciously ecstatic way, that caused each inane word to drop with all the pomp of pearls and diamonds. He had formed a very favourable opinion of the young heiress, who, with all her shrinking timidity and reserve, never was flurried or excited. The listless apathy induced partly by her long illness, partly by a sense of the intolerable dullness of her companion, pleased him as an evidence of perfect breeding, and he exerted himself to the utmost to be agreeable. Her quietude suited him much better than the merry sparkling raillery of her cousin, who bewitched only to plague, and who could never be entrapped into half-an-hour's seriousness without the danger of an explosion at the end. Talking to Mr. Blennerhasset, Lord Ingram seemed to lose something of the wistful restlessness that had of late distinguished him. Now and then his eye turned uneasily to his daughter, as

if to assure himself she was there. Lord Dunderhead's manner pleased him; the old gentleman was an autocrat on matters of good taste, and he seemed so perfectly satisfied with his companion, that everyone else must perforce be so too. Mr. Blennerhasset seldom looked towards his betrothed; to be sure he was engaged in a deep argument with Lord Ingram, an argument, too, of a very remarkable nature, in which neither gave relevant answers to disconnected questions, and yet neither detected the other, so abstruse was the speculation, and that may account for the fact that the lawyer's keen blue eyes remained fixed on Miss Ingram, as though by their concentrated gaze to steady his mind.

Miss Ingram was in her glory. Out of pure malice she had invited a cordon of her old beaux, amongst whom were Harry Dillon and Mr. Clinton, and some score of others who had been at the feet of the golden calf. She knew very well they would come to secure an early introduction to the new heiress, and she promised herself rare amusements in watching their various methods of wriggling off the old love before wriggling on the new. She was enjoying the first instalment of it now, for Lord Dunderhead continued to monopolise the daughter of the house, and the young men, not yet having trained themselves to resist the fascinations they had always yielded to, fell as if naturally into their places around Miss Ingram, whose throne was a couch of crimson velvet, over which she displayed her rich robes right royally, while she held what she told Jenny in passing was her last grand drawing-room.

Never, perhaps, had she dressed herself with such taste, never had she looked so provokingly charming as now, when the brilliant crimson of an inward fever tinged her

cheek and lightened her eyes, while, conscious that her subjects were about to desert her, she had no motive to refrain from making them feel her power while she yet possessed it. They should feel it ere she was yet practically dethroned, she said to herself, and they should not forsake her, since she would forestal their good intentions for them.

So her scornful mirth knew no limit to-night, her derisive sallies were uncompromising, her merry mockery was merciless; and still as if in a charmed circle those young men lingered round her, promising themselves that by-and-by they would cultivate the better dowered beauties, who were now entertained by gallant gentlemen in antiquated queues and monstrous coat tails.

The spell was broken by the announcement of dinner. Several looked anxiously towards the young lady to whom Lord Dunderhead gave his arm, a few withdrew hurriedly to secure a not portionless partner, but the rest, with some dim remembrance of a time when they had all contended for the privilege of taking the belle of the season down to dinner, tried to get up a travesty of the old proceedings.

She looked up at them with an exceedingly quizzical glance, as if pondering whom she should select, and the seeming doubt imparted some little show of eagerness to the sham contest. Her eye rested longest on Lord de Vere, whose mother was now anxiously watching him.

'I believe I ought to go down with you,' she said, with a gracious smile, 'for I know you like pleasing the countess, and she thinks me the dearest, sweetest girl in the United Kingdom. I have it on good authority—she told me so herself. Still, I am a very bad person, I never do

just what I ought, so I shall disappoint the dear countess just this once. Now which of you gentlemen can promise to be most amusing?’

‘Miss Ingram, permit me to offer you my arm.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Dalzell. Oh! it’s Mr. Blennerhasset. Well——’ and she glanced across to see that Kate was provided for. ‘That will do.’

With a haughty grace she bowed to the mustachioed circle, and swept past on the lawyer’s arm. She had accepted him as her escort to show her independence of the others, but they had scarcely reached the dining-room when she felt the embarrassment of the inevitable companionship. Well, she could be insolent to him too. Why not? He had not put his neck under her golden slipper, true, but he had wronged her all the same, he had condemned her unheard, and it was too late to trust now.

‘Miss Ingram, you treat us very badly,’ observed Mr. Clinton, who was her other neighbour. ‘You seem to imagine that our allegiance can be less true now that there is another heiress of Ingram.’

The speech restored her to her mocking self, and she laughed a charming little laugh.

‘How could I suppose such a thing? And you, a man of the world too, to put such dreadful thoughts into the *rudesse* of language. I am shocked.’

‘But I cannot allow you to entertain a bad opinion of me.’

‘On the contrary, I have a very good opinion of you, and I shall consider it downright ill-breeding for you to suppose anything else.’

‘Then be a little kinder than you have been for the last half hour.’

‘Have I been unkind? I am truly sorry. I would:

not for the world offend such true friends,' and she bowed with ceremonious politeness.

'You might have worse, at least, Miss Ingram,' he retorted, nettled at her tone.

'Why, we have always been excellent friends, Mr. Clinton,' she said, with sudden gravity. 'Don't let us quarrel; I assure you I have no wish that way. Why should I? Have you not all been friends in the true acceptance of the word? Have you not all willingly yielded me the stores of pleasure, of intellect, of homage? Have you not all faithfully contributed your quota of amusement to the highest bidder? And why should I profess to be ungrateful to those who have so carefully performed their stipulated part of the bargain, now that I am no longer in a position to perform mine? On the contrary, I am very grateful to you all. You have made my life a very merry one, and surely that is something to be thankful for.'

'So we have only contributed to your amusement?'

'Now you shall not pick a quarrel, no, you really shall not,' she said imperiously, for Mr. Clinton was a favourite. 'Attend to your right-hand neighbour till you are in a more amiable mood, and then come back to me.'

She got through that dinner somehow, maintaining towards Mr. Blennerhasset the haughty dignity dashed with derision that she had adopted of late. Her manner said plainly as manner could say, 'I am Beatrice Ingram still. I have as much real right to your deference as ever I had, and no more.' She was as one who had gained a kingdom rather than lost a fortune, and in her most mirthful recklessness she commanded homage with a queenliness she had never before displayed. Mr. Blennerhasset seldom addressed her, never except when common

politeness demanded it, and she puzzled her brain to find a reason for his taking the trouble to offer her his arm.

‘He can be generous, although he is not just,’ she thought, with some bitterness. ‘He does not wish me to feel my fallen fortunes, as no doubt he thinks such a frivolous butterfly must. And I do, I do feel the change, but not as those people think. It is no overwhelming revelation to me that those who vowed love to me a few weeks since should now only seem to exist for a glance from my cousin. I do not even accuse them of inconsistency for being so constant to the money-bags, for keeping their faces so persistently turned to their god Mammon, regardless of whether his throne is in the gorgeous East or the newly radiant West. Ah! no, it is not their faithlessness that will move me; it is not their love or friendship I shall regret, for what I never had I never lost. But it is the endless amusement I shall miss, the power of laughing with them or at them, as my fancy went. I shall be no longer able to congregate round me the savants of a city, and unlock with my golden key the storehouse of their treasures of wit and knowledge, to concentrate in the tiny focus of my own circle the most brilliant rays of giant intellects, the bright fancies, the sparkling epigrams, the entrancing chivalry of the various luminaries of this charming planet. To me it will be no longer permitted to flirt without an object. Any naturalness I may permit to be visible will be husband hunting. My silliest smile to a single man will be construed into a bid for an establishment, so that I, I to whom the charming gallantry that is charming precisely because it means nothing, entails no responsibility, gives pleasure in the present without thought of bondage in the future, the dalliance of good

society, that involves no debtor and creditor account, since you pay as you go, I, to whom these bubbles are the very breath of life, must fold my hands and close my lips, and look sour on those who seek to please me, for fear match-making mammas may have to warn their unfledged nestlings against the arts of that designing girl.'

'You have got into a brown study, Miss Ingram. Mrs. Chirrup has been looking at you for the last ten minutes.'

She started and rose, and like a troop of wild swans, in their fleecy evening attire, the ladies flocked to the drawing-room. This was Miss Ingram's time for making her peace with those of her own sex whom she had neglected, and must neglect again directly the gentlemen returned. She had no wish to appear other than kind and courteous, but she could not bring herself to cut a flirtation short for sake of asking a dowager how her last doctor explained her bronchial affections, or condoling with a simpering young lady 'over the disasters inevitable on changing maids. Now, however, there was no flirtation, scientific, religious, or amorous, possible, and she performed with a very good grace the duties that had devolved on her as daughter of the house, and that she had resolved to slip out of only as Kate was competent to undertake them. Having sat a little there, chatted a little here, quizzed one, congratulated another, she came to where Kate and Jenny sat talking.

'How comfortable you look,' she said, seating herself on the carpet at their feet, 'and I so hot and tired. Jenny Joy, put your little cool hand on my forehead.'

'You mustn't sit there—'

'Yes, yes, let her be,' interposed Jenny, drawing the tired head to her lap; and so, holding a hand of each, Bea-

INGRAM PLACE.

... sat talking in a desultory fashion that involved no effect.

'Now, Kitty Ingram, chatterbox—dear me, how unlike a chatterbox you are now—tell me how you like your lovers to be.'

'My lovers to be?' said Kate, a good deal amused. 'I don't know them.'

'Didn't you see them collected around me before dinner?'

'And do you imagine I have the conceit to suppose that those who have admired you could bestow a thought on me?'

'No, you haven't the knowledge of the world even to believe it, but it is nevertheless true. What will you bet, Kitty, that they are not all around you before bed-time?'

'I'm not going to bet anything so absurd.'

'Because you know you'd lose.'

'Ah, cousin Beatrice, if their liking is so easily changed it cannot matter much who has it.'

'Is that meant for a sarcasm or a consolation? I don't feel inclined for either. Do you not understand, my dear, that these devoted cavaliers are simply the Baroness Ingram's appendages, like the great O'Connell tail? You have come into their possession as legally and lawfully as you have come into possession of your name and heritage. But I have enjoyed the good of them—no little, let me tell you—for a good many years, and I am not going to malign them. The only motive that led me to mention them was that, if you put away in your memory all the soft things each one utters, I can promise you some genuine fun by placing each compliment in juxtaposition with the fellow ~~one~~ paid me last season by the same earnest, single-hearted

admirer. 'Is it a bargain?' she asked laughingly, for even as she spoke two or three gentlemen had made their way to the alcove.

'What a low seat you have selected, Miss Ingram,' lisped a tall and very handsome guardsman, from whose watch chain dangled a timepiece the size of a shilling, and who, with a sort of gigantic infantine playfulness, seemed to emulate the gambols of a young elephant. His little tie, his even tasty pin, his charming soft curls, might have been the pride of a pretty boy of ten instead of the tallest, broadest man in the room.

'Did I not always profess a penchant for low seats?'

'I scarcely think so.'

'What a bad memory you must have, Mr. Purcell. That is a bad character with which to present you to my cousin.'

'Ah, then, pray change it,' he lisped, opening wide his big blue eyes.

'Kate, allow me to introduce Lieutenant Purcell to your favourable notice. He used to have a very good memory.'

In a short time the alcove was as full as it could hold, and Jenny participated in the sport. Between her and Miss Ingram the gentlemen had enough to do, but Kate took everything quietly, as was her wont. Blennerhasset watched the group from the window, and at last joined it. Miss Ingram, unaware of his close proximity, dealt out her merciless raillery as thick as hail, till, looking up, she met the curious glance of the stern blue eyes. A sudden sense of the undignified position she had chosen rushed across her, and she rose to her feet. 'Come out on the terrace, Jenny,' she said.

The elf accompanied her, and arm-in-arm the two girls strolled in the moonlight. Lord Ingram joined his niece, and drew her aside.

‘My dear, I want your advice. Blennerhasset has something to say to me to-morrow. I can guess what it is about, but it is very hard to lose my Kate so soon. Still, I am aware that she was engaged to him before. Now what I want you to tell me—my brain seems so strangely confused—’ and in truth he paused, and put up his hand across his forehead in the peculiar excited way noticeable of late, and almost startling from its contrast with his usual frigid demeanour. She put her arm through his, and stroked his hand with the caressing gentleness of the days when he had no daughter.

‘Tell me what you wish, dear.’

‘Ah, I know—yes—do you know, do you think, Kate will be happy with him? I want to be prepared for him—he’s such a clever fellow. Does she—do you think she cares for him? Would she be disappointed if I sent him away?’

Whiter grew the moonlight on the young face.

‘Yes, uncle Ralph, I think she does care for him.’

‘Well, I know she was engaged to him—but still, don’t you think it strange that she shouldn’t prefer that handsome, gallant young soldier to this rigid, just—and therefore unjust—man? I could better bear to give her to him. Through all he was so true to my child—so true.’

‘Don’t wrong, Mr. Blennerhasset, uncle Ralph,’ she said, in low, quiet tones. ‘He is very honourable; you need not grudge your daughter to so good a man. If he has seemed distrustful it is but the peculiarity of so finely sensitive a temperament.’

'Thank you, my dear. I knew you would advise for the best. Still—'

He paused again and did not resume the subject, but after some fitful hesitation left the terrace, and Beatrice again joined Jenny.

'What is the matter, my dear,' asked the elf, winding her arms round her friend, forgetting all barriers of rank when trouble came.

'Nothing, Jenny Joy,' whispered the Dublin belle, letting her head sink on the faithful shoulder, 'only, only I am so happy.'

'Happy is it?' and there was a world of wistful sympathy in the voice so exquisitely musical now, in the swimming eyes. 'What a very white, cold happiness it is, my dear.'

'But it is a very good happiness, Jenny Joy, a right good, true happiness. Help me to bear it.'

Oh, and she did help her to bear it, this tiny untaught girl with the great big heart, she helped her friend to bear this new great happiness that had much indeed for the immortal soul, but little, oh, so little for poor human nature.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHARLIE DEVEREUX AND MISS JOICE MAKE A COMPACT.

THE beautiful moonlight steeped that beautiful old Place in its cold pure light. Stretching up as if with longing glances to the queen of night, the quaint ivy-draped turrets seemed clothed in a wondrous mellow light that fell down to the soft green sward, to the dark fir trees

and glistening laurels, lingering lovingly on the fair young girls, the noble men, who wandered here and there among the fantastic fountains, sparkling, shimmering, shining with a glint of smiling treachery on that most beautiful, most treacherous sea.

Charlie Devereux could not understand his cousin. He watched her with a dim idea that behind that sparkling jest and silvery laugh there lurked that traditional beast of prey. But Rohan Blennerhasset had no such consolation; he only saw the cloak that in this case was so broided and blazoned with the pride of a woman's heart; he saw only the practised coquette, utterly heartless.

'Have you heard—did Flossy tell you—that it's all made up between them?' Charlie whispered to Jenny.

'Yes.'

The tone, the earnest clasp of the little brown hand, comforted him as they were meant to do, and Miss Joice, strangely moved by the various influences of the time, wept silent tears, none the less bitter that no sob betrayed them. A strange keen pain came with every note of the music that floated over the waters, and still as if fascinated she kept her eyes fixed on Kate—Kate, surpassingly beautiful in the pale moonlight; Kate, beside whom sat one noble gentleman, hers and hers only; Kate, rich Kate, from whom never wandered the farewell glance of that other man, equally noble, nay, grander, truer, equally hers and hers only, inferior to the other in naught but good fortune. Oh, how bountifully gifted was this girl, who without an effort won the love of two such gallant men. Not envious, not jealous, oh, no, only very, very sad was the little black-eyed elf, as she drank in the sweet night sounds that moved her to crave for the sympathy

she could never have. She could love so well, yet she must never hope to be loved; she could be so faithful, so true, yet she must never hope to be first in any home, more than a temporary appendage to anyone.

Lost in her bitter thoughts she leaned back, her eyes still fixed on that exquisite face, her mind filled with a vague wonder as to whether Miss Ingram whose trouble was losing the one she loved, could suffer as much as her whose grief was that she might never be loved.

Charlie suddenly turned his head. He was shocked with a sudden sense of heartlessness when he looked down at the disconsolate little figure, whose misery and dejection were so plain in the bright moonlight. He noted the look she bent on those two grand specimens of nature's handiwork, and immediately formed his own conclusions.

'Poor little Jenny Joy. She, too, loves Rohan Blennerhasset.' This was his explanation of her tears, her strange look of suffering. 'Oh, why, why is it that these generous, high-souled women should love this man, who is not worthy any one of them, who is incapable of comprehending their grand natures?'

He waited for the poor little elf, and put her arm in his. She had been so brave, she had comforted him when his own trouble was heaviest on her, and so he led her about the lawn, away from the lighted drawing-room, the rattling piano that was attracting all the strollers.

'Poor little Jenny,' he said, after a long silence. 'Well, at least we can sympathise with each other.'

'Why?' she asked with a short gasp.

'You gave me a hint of your sorrow once, Jenny, but I was so blinded by my own that I never saw it till to-night.'

Well, well. It was very hard that he should fathom that mournful secret, but why not? Was it not a fact patent to everybody? That is, to everybody who could even for a moment ponder on the possibility of associating affection with the grotesque figure of the dressmaker of the Theatre Royal. Why should she be sore about it?

'I had better say good-bye to-night, Jenny Joy?' he resumed after a pause.

'Are you going too?' she said, drearily.

'Yes.' The fair open brow was contracted moodily now. 'I've nothing more to do here.'

'When do you go?'

'To-morrow, early. I wanted to say good-bye to you in time; we have been very good friends and confederates, haven't we?'

'Yes,' said the poor little thing pitifully. 'I suppose that is why I am going to lose you?'

There was a strange sad depth of sweetness in the troubled eyes, in the low musical monotone, that stirred the compassionate heart of this brave man. And as if to make the contrast more striking, there on the other side of the great cedar tree two persons were walking in a quiet content they had not known for many years. It was Kate Ingram and Mr. Blennerhasset; they were talking very gravely and earnestly, and in the brilliant light of that April evening their expression seemed that of relief. Some explanation had at last been come to, and evidently a satisfactory one to both.

'How happy she looks,' was Charlie's involuntary exclamation. Then he turned manfully away. He was content that his last look at her should see her happiness, and he turned to the little figure by his side. He had been

very successful, but success is not always sweet, and his well-nigh sickened him.

‘Don’t forget me, Jenny.’

Her dejection had completely mastered her to-night, as it had never done before.

‘I have not so much to remember that I should find it easy to forget you,’ she said, bitterly. Then with a sudden vigorous effort she rallied, and was once more herself—brave, energetic Jenny Joy.

‘No, I shall not forget you, and you must not forget us.’

‘If I only could.’ It was his turn now.

‘Don’t try,’ she said, with a sharp briskness that was invigorating; ‘it will do you no harm to remember your trouble. It didn’t come for nothing, you know, Mr. Devereux. It’s got to make you stronger, braver, better in every way before it’s done with you. Don’t go to your travels with the idea of running away from it, you can’t do that; but take your memories boldly with you, and make them do their proper work by making you a better man, and remember that they were never sent to make a mope of you, or to write out a charter for a useless life. Mind, Mr. Devereux, there’s nothing in the whole world so despicable as a man who is no good to anybody. No sorrow, no suffering, can give you a license to mope your life away, to take all and give nothing; so don’t let any sickly sentimentalism sink you to that wretched thing—a creature without a place in the world. You’re not the sort to sink easily into such degradation; but take my advice, and don’t do violence to the better part of your nature, or when it is dead, and you are fain to bury it out of sight, it might strike you you could have done better

than spent your years weeping maudlin tears over its grave. Don't try to shirk your burden—that's useless; don't hug it to your heart either, but bear it on your shoulders like a man.'

All night long the image of that patient, suffering girl who spoke such brave words haunted Charlie.

'Poor little Jenny Joy,' he said to himself, as he packed some things his servant had forgotten. 'She suffers so much from that passionate, ardent nature of hers; she has not a woman's usual defences against keen sorrow—frivolity, and a multitude of ties; and yet how well she bears it. If it is dreadful for me to suffer, what must it be for a girl, tied to whatever spot fate and the proprieties may consign her to; debarred from the thousand changes a man may lawfully seek. And yesterday I thought there was no sorrow like my sorrow.'

Jenny Joy was an early riser. The miserable generally are. It is only the happy who find that sleep cheats them out of the best portion of their lives. She sat by the open casement as the pillars of purple and gold reared themselves in the east, shifting, deepening, widening, to let the god of day come through. But she was heedless of those gorgeous piles of violent and pink and pale amethyst; heedless of the balmy south wind laden with the perfume of the morning; of the twittering songsters whose blithe-carol rushed out in a jubilant chorus; blind, deaf to the beauty and melody, except in so far as they made her heart ache, seeing only the weary, weary life before her.

A quick, crisp step on the gravel walk caused her to look out.

'Why, Mr. Devereux, I thought you were going by the early train?'

'Well, so I thought, too,' he replied, looking up with a comical smile. 'But you see I'm here yet, and what's more it's all your fault.'

'My fault?'

'Yes. Come down and have a walk to the beach.'

She was soon beside him, and they had scarcely got clear of the house when Charlie plunged into a new resolution, that, well as she knew Charlie Devereux, took Miss Joice fairly by surprise. She waited till he had finished, for the simple reason that he had taken her breath away. Then she looked up and said in her very sharpest tones—

'What nonsense are you talking, Charlie Devereux?'

'I think we should get along capitally,' said Charlie, not in the least disconcerted. 'We are both in precisely the same predicament; we like each other well enough for mutual condolence, and that is a great bond of sympathy. let me tell you.'

An amused smile shone through the tears that would come, a smile that deepened into sublimity in its fortitude, compassion, and gratitude.

'Oh, you foolish, generous-hearted Charlie, how you would wrong yourself if I let you.'

'Just the reverse. I'm all wrong as it is. I want you to right me. You'll keep me up to the mark, and I feel awfully inclined to degenerate just now.'

'I can do that for you still, if I could do it at all,' she interrupted.

'And then you'd have no time to be very miserable, for you'd have your hands full with a great blundering fellow like me. And you like me enough for that, now you know you do, don't you?'

'Of course I like you, you ridiculous boy. I like you

so well that I'm quite sorry you make such a goose of yourself. Now let me hear no more of this nonsense, and before you go give me your promise as a gentleman that you won't go and propose to anyone else until I can give you a certificate of sanity.'

'You might as well have me, Jenny,' he remarked, with an odd mixture of kindness and comicality. 'I'm not a bad fellow in the main, and if you refuse me I shall have no one to turn to.'

'Don't try just yet,' and now her voice in spite of her was soft and sweet. 'I do like you very, very much, and that if nothing else would prevent me marrying you. I like you so much I cannot bear to think of losing your friendship. Mr. Devereux, if I were even a fitting wife for a noble gentleman like you, I would not dream of accepting your generous proposal. Believe me, we could not do such violence to our own hearts, be so untrue to our best selves, without suffering for it in some shape. But let us still be friends, friends always.'

There was that in her grave seriousness that told him she was wiser than he.

'Friends always—nothing more?'

'We could not possibly be more, you foolish boy, and I would not for worlds have it less.'

'Well, Jenny, I wanted to comfort you, to make your life more pleasant, to do for you what you do for me.'

'You have done so already,' she said, with a depth of humility he could not comprehend. 'You do not know how meanly I think of myself, or you would understand what an amazing thing it is to me that anyone, much less a man handsome, young, and noble, should, even for the time it took him to utter the words, contemplate sharing

his name with me—me, the witch of the Latin; me, an eerie, shiftless creature, unlike all others of my kind, never a child, scarcely daring to lay claim to the name of woman.'

'You may be a witch and an eerie elf too; in your tantrums you are just both; but this I know, that you are also one of the truest, most honourable women in the world. It is not now that knowledge has come to me, Jenny. I had it long, long ago, long before a great sorrow had bound us so closely together.'

She did not repel the words with bitter mockery as she might at another time; she only held out her hand, and said simply—


'Thank you, Mr. Devereux. I know I am not like that; but, oh! it makes me so happy to know that anyone could ever think so of me.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR. DALZELL TRIES HIS HAND AT MATCH-MAKING AND FAILS MISERABLY.

ROBERT DALZELL sat alone in the studio sacred to him at Ingram. An unfinished picture was before him on the easel, but the figures ceased to grow on the canvas, for the spirit that had called them into life was travelling far away.

Travelling backward over the records of a lonely life, tired and weary grew the spirit of the man; travelling over the future blank and bare, only to grow wearier still.




He had got fame, he had got riches, and what good were they to him? So he mused, till a reproving thought checked him. Old and dull and grey-haired, he might never hope to overtake the happiness he had missed in his youth; but it was still left to him to earn a child's gratitude.

What right had he to feel aggrieved that a handsome young man should look into those eerie eyes he saw ever and always? What right had he to turn in sickened disgust from the art that had been mother, wife, child to him all these years, merely because he had looked at the picture made by Charlie Devereux bending over the sturdy little waif who would owe him nothing? Should he not rather set himself to the task of promoting so desirable an union? He should and would.

Of course she had refused him. No need for Charlie's preparations for departure to tell him that. It would not have been Jenny, generous and true, to do anything else. She would be the last one to forget inequality of fortune where another was concerned; though for herself she defied the world and all its precedents. Well, it was in his, Robert Dalzell's, power to remove that inequality. Of course. He had made up his mind to that when the picture so fairly touched by the morning sunlight had dawned upon him, and he was only pondering all this time over the means.

He covered the easel on which lay the unfinished painting, with its fervid glory of light, its sombre unfathomable shadow, as though he took no more pleasure in it, and went to look for Jenny.

He found her in the pretty sitting-room where the three young girls generally spent their mornings, very few.



of the ladies appearing to claim their attention before luncheon. He lingered a few moments among them, noting in a dreamy kind of way that Kate was brighter, Miss Ingram paler and quieter than usual.

‘I want your help in the studio, Jenny. Can you come for a moment?’

Could she come? Of course she could come. Such a question.

‘First, now, I must show you my work,’ he said, raising the covering, ‘and you must tell me whether you are pleased with it.’

It was a sunset scene: Pile upon pile of red gold clouds, gorgeous masses of startling beauty, shed a lurid light on two figures standing out clear and bold in the foreground. One was a man, seated on a mossy stone, a fragment of some of the many boulders that lay about. A painter’s easel was thrown beside him, his hands were clasped over his face partially hiding it, but scant scattered locks of brown hair broadly streaked with grey fell over his temples, and his eyes were turned to the molten fire in the west, towards the river that flowed between like a broad belt of blood, as though he would wring the secret of their colouring from them. His whole attitude bespoke impotence, and a more striking suggestion of a man’s defeat when struggling with nature could hardly be imagined. The other was a girl, childish in aspect, with olive skin tinged with the rosy radiance of the clouds. Her dress was scant and poor and travel-stained, but it seemed as if the drapery were purposely left plain, that not a look might be distracted from the divine pity that shone in the wistful face, the great sad black eyes.

‘Well, Jenny, is it a good likeness?’

'That is you—but—who is that?'

'Don't you think it's like you, then?'

In her heart Jenny knew it was not. Ah! she had not studied the old mirror upstairs for nothing.

'No, sir, but it is very good of you to make me look like that. I'd rather you painted me that way than as I am.'

He covered up the picture very deliberately, and she waited patiently to be told what help he required from her.

'Jenny, what answer did you make Dr. Dalzell?'

'About going to the hospital? I think I'll go.'

'Do so. You will go as his daughter; he desires nothing better.'

'I'm not going that way.'

'But he wishes to adopt you. Whether you agree or not, I shall regard you as the daughter of my nearest relation. You are therefore my natural heiress. No, you cannot alter it—this is my will,' and he laid his hand on a sealed packet on the table.

'So you see, Jenny, if I cannot have my own way living, I shall have it dead. But you might let me have a little of it while I'm here.'

'Oh, sir, it's the only thing I've got, my independence; don't take it from me.'

'Independence may go too far, child. You refused Mr. Devereux to-day, did you not?'

Her conscious start of troubled surprise was answer enough. She looked anxiously at him, wondering which of her unspoken secrets would next be dragged to light.

'You might have confided in me, Jenny. What good is my money to me, if it will not forward the establishment of the child of the dearest friend I ever had?'

'You're very good—but I'm not in any hurry to get an establishment. Much I'd know what to do with it when I'd got it,' she responded, tartly.

'I do not wish you to marry Mr. Devereux with a shadow of inequality between you. I have the power and the right to dower you richly, richly as even Mr. Devereux's bride should be. Do not think I am conferring a favour; I am asking one.'

'How good you are,' she said, with bitter gratitude. 'But I tell you I shall never marry Mr. Devereux.'

'He is young and handsome?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Good, brave, accomplished?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You like him, do you not?'

'Oh, yes; who could know Charlie Devereux without liking him?'

'And yet you refuse him?'

'Yes.'

'Why? I have a right to know. Our friendship, Jenny, does not count by years or months or days, it is to be measured by thoughts, feelings, sympathies; therefore I am a very old friend, though I have only known you for two years. Why do you refuse Mr. Devereux?'

'Why? Because the life in the attic, with my canaries to twitter all day while I work, and you to let me look at your pictures sometimes, pleases me better.'

'What! spend your young life in a garret with no companion, no amusement save the prosy talk of a dull, grey-haired old man! Ah! I am not so selfish as that; do not tempt me to be,' and he spoke now to himself rather than to her. 'You must marry and be happy, you must

leave me to my life of loneliness; it's only what I was accustomed to, before I found you, with your ready sympathies, your keen sensibilities. Why should I fly in the face of Heaven because two whole years have been taken out of my count of misery, because for two whole years I have been warmed and cheered in a glorious sunshine? What though I shall fall back into darkness deeper than before? Shall I not be thankful for two whole years? Shall I not have the remembrance to comfort me always?' He spoke aloud the bitterness of his trouble almost unconsciously.

'It is, then, a comfort—never mind how little—but still a comfort—to have me always near you?' she said eagerly. 'Is that so?'

'A comfort? Is it comfort to have the joy and vigour of youth, the freshness and beauty of a grand, warm nature, infused into a life whose prime is gone? Perhaps it may please you to know what a happiness you have been to me, how from the time you came upon me by that lonely stone the thought of you has brightened and beautified the art I was beginning to fancy cold and dead.'

Transfixed with the greatness of the revelation, she stood speechless, her eyes ablaze with excitement, her red lips parted. She a happiness to anyone? She a comfort? It was incredible; yet he said it, he certainly said it. A great flood of gratitude filled the passionate heart almost to bursting. She who had been so rebellious, so impious, who was she to have this supreme happiness given her? An ecstatic joy filled every sense of her being, while a keen pain thrilled every fibre for those who were less fortunate than herself.

‘It does please me,’ she said at length, very slowly, ‘so well that I desire no other pleasure.’

‘You understand, then, that being your debtor, I have a right to repay somewhat. And stay—do not fear—I am willing to become your debtor still further—you will learn to give me a daughter’s love, a little corner in your remembrances.’

‘You had that long ago, long ago,’ she said, in those rare musical tones, ‘and now I will make a bargain with you. If you will promise to say no more about Mr. Devereux, I in my turn will promise that when anyone I wish to marry proposes for me, I will ask you to dower me.’

‘Can I trust you?’

‘I promise.’

‘But Mr. Devereux?’

‘Ah! sir, it’s no use trying your hand at match-making; you don’t understand it, let me tell you, and you might as well leave it alone.’

CHAPTER XL.

THE LAST GOOD-BYE.

LORD INGRAM’S restless mood increased rather than diminished. He had grown visibly weaker, and strangely fitful. The only thing that seemed capable of lulling him back to his former placid self was the low, sweet voice of his daughter, as she read some poet’s thoughts aloud. She never wearied of the task, and it seemed to soothe him wonderfully. To Kate it seemed to bring back the old

days when she had peered through the laurels into the study, fascinated by the grave, haughty face that had spell-bound her on the old Latin.

It was changed now, this haughty face, and wistful as ever grew the grey-black eyes as she tried to read the deep lines, the unsightly furrows. Now, as then, her heart went out to the lonely man, lonely in spite of his rank, his wealth, for these appendages had lost their value; lonely in spite of the presence, the passionate clinging love of his daughter, for he had lost the power of realising that he had found her. Yet no one suspected how his poor mind wandered and groped in the darkness that had come upon it, or how hopelessly he struggled with the inextricable confusion that linked, beyond his power to separate them, a child restored and a child disgraced.

Yet sweet and lovely enough to soothe a troubled mind looked Kate, Baroness Ingram to be, as she sat on a low seat beside Lord Ingram's chair, and filled the cool, pleasant room with the silvery music of a most flexible voice. Very pure and fair in her simple white dress, and her eyes never wandered from her book, except to rest on the weary, worn face.

'What a pity! what a pity!'

'What is a pity?' she asked, putting down the book, and laying her cool soft hand on his.

'Charlie Devereux should have married you. I promised his father—but how can I break their engagement?'

'Whose engagement?'

'Charlie's. Beatrice is not the right one now; he ought to see that.'

He spoke peevishly and irritably. The cool hand was withdrawn, the reading proceeded, mingling insensibly

with the twitter of the birds—not the shrill and deafening clamour of imprisoned canaries, but the free, unfettered chant of thrush and blackbird, poised in the leafy heights, whose luxuriant foliage subdued the song to entrancing melody, with the gurgle of unseen fountains, with the balmy sighs of a thousand flowers.

Charlie Devereux, having missed the early train waiting for Jenny, thought he might as well remain for breakfast, and by so doing lost the last of the morning trains. Some commissions his cousin wished to write out detained him still one o'clock, and after luncheon there was no earthly reason why he should slink off instead of saying good-bye in a proper manner. So my lord's discreet valet put his black head in, and then his body, to whisper in his most dulcet tones—

'Mr. Devereux, my lord, wishes to see you for a moment.'

'Let him come in here,' said Lord Ingram eagerly. Perhaps the most distinct idea his wearied mind was able to grasp was that of this man, who had always believed in his daughter.

'I have come to bid you good-bye, my lord,' said Charlie quietly.

'Why, why?' was the peevish exclamation.

'I have deferred my tour so long——'

'Oh, I can't spare you; don't go away just when I want you all about me. Dear me, it's all wrong. How is it?'

Then he forgot Charlie's presence while he wandered off into a dreamy speculation as to how Charlie should be so tiresome to get engaged to the wrong cousin, when he was so worthy of the right one, and at the same time wondering how Kate could be so blind to this grand, generous faith, as to prefer clever, doubting Johan Blennerhass

Charlie's low voice did not disturb him, as he addressed a few low words to the white-robed figure, so like a beautiful flower against the dark-green velvet carpet, redolent of a subtle perfume, faint and pure.

He was nothing, he could be nothing to her, and yet he had been very good. She would never forget that, and so she controlled her voice to speak kindly and hopefully of his return, although he was engaged to Miss Ingram; but somehow a constraint in the tone struck Charlie painfully.

'Have I been making a fool of myself?' he wondered. 'Have I been sickening her with any mandlin regrets?'

At last he rose and approached Lord Ingram.

'Good-bye, uncle Ralph,' he said, stretching out his hand with the old boyish frankness that became him so well, and throwing something of the old gaiety into his voice. 'I'm going to have a merry cruise, so wish me good luck in old-fashioned style.'

'Good-bye, my boy, I wish you weren't going—but—but—ah! it's all my own fault. Ah, Charlie, I never was so wise as now that I'm going down to the grave. My brain is a little bewildered at times, my mental faculties a little clouded, but my new eyes have been opened, and I see that if we would only let our destinies alone they wouldn't be nearly so tangled. Don't you ever set about straightening yours, Charlie, it's the worst thing you can do; and above all leave other people's alone. You may think your pottering is mending, but you never made a more miserable mistake.'

'Do you think so?' he said, with a bitterness that was lost on Lord Ingram.

'I don't think it, I know it. And then we call our faults by such grand names that they don't seem follies at

all; we call our flying in the face of the decrees of Providence proper prudence, our stifling of all natural feeling unselfishness, our desire to have a finger in every man's destiny love for our fellow creatures, and perhaps that's the most miserable mistake of all.'

'Oh, I wish I had thought so before. I wish I hadn't been so anxious about the welfare of others,' muttered Charlie savagely, as he turned away. 'Good heavens! if I should have been bungling all the time.'

Kate came out on the grassy plot that faced the study, and stood with her back to the shining laurels, gleaming in the yellow sunlight, with as glorious a framework of fir-crowned hill tops and waving woods as ever formed the setting of so lovely a flower. Full of the new thought, Charlie took both her hands in his, and looked straight into the wistful eyes.

'Are you happy, Kate?'

Under the circumstances this question sounded to Kate like an insult. Did he fear that his rather sudden retreat to Miss Ingram's camp would break her heart? With the sensitive pride that is often strongest in those timid, shrinking natures, she withdrew her hands, and stood before him clothed in a dignity that suited well the queenly contour of her figure, but that he had never seen her wear until now.

'Certainly I am happy, Mr. Devereux; I have everything to make me so.'

'Pardon me—you are my cousin, remember, so forgive me if I spoke too freely. Say Good-bye kindly, it may be the last time. One never knows; at least it is the last time I shall see you till you are Rohan Blennerhasset's wife. Well, I wish you every happiness, and him too—yes, him too—

and I want to be your true friend, both your friends, always.'

'I shall never marry Mr. Blennerhasset.'

There was no faltering now. He was nothing, could be nothing to her, you know; so there was no reason why she should not set him right, and send him away with a better opinion of her common sense. The outrage of that imagined insult gave her a calm, passionless coldness; gave her, too, a self-possession she could not otherwise have attained. And though this man had offended, she would compel herself to speak kindly, as to one who had once been very good to her; she would compel him too to respect her.

'Did he back out—I mean, did he not hold to his proposal?'

'I believe—I know he would have married me—he is a strictly honourable man—if I had insisted, but he never loved me.'

'And you—you refused him?'

'Yes.'

'Why? You loved him once.'

'I was very grateful to him for his kindness to one so lone as myself;' and she crossed her arms and drew herself up with unconscious stateliness, 'but my love for Rohan Blennerhasset died out the day I found he had none to give me.'

'Not to revive again?'

'Not to revive again!'

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. DALZELL TRIES HIS HAND AT MATCH-MAKING AGAIN, AND
WITH BETTER SUCCESS.

AN hour later, as Mr. Devereux was racing along the passages in the reckless break-neck fashion peculiar to him, he blundered up against Mr. Dalzell.

'Why, Devereux, your man told me you were trying to catch the ten train.'

'Well, I'm here yet. Didn't you see me at lunch?'

'I was painting till now. Is that your trap?'

Charlie looked out of the window and laughed.

'Good gracious! I forgot all about it.'

'How many last good-byes do you say? Your partings must be pretty elaborate affairs.'

'Well, yes, I've said a great many to-day. I believe I've crammed as many into six hours as a good manager gets into six weeks. But I believe I've really said my veritable last good-bye now, and I tell you what, old fellow, I'm not sorry.'

'You're going by the five train, I suppose?'

'No, I don't think I'll go to-day, Dalzell; you and I have been chums a long while now, and I don't know anyone I should like better to congratulate me.'

Back into the grey shadow of the corner went the painter; into the grey shadow that clothed him body and soul with its sombre hue. His nerveless hands were down by his side, and did not move to meet Charlie's.

'Has she accepted you?'

‘Yes. Do you think I am such a coxcomb as to speak without warrant? Wish me joy, Dalzell.’

‘I do wish you joy, from my heart,’ he said, stretching out his hand. There was something in the shadowed face, in the unnaturally quiet voice, that thrilled the gallant heart that happiness would never render selfish.

‘I have not grieved you, Dalzell? I’m a great awkward fellow, I know.’

‘I couldn’t wish better news than you have told me, Devereux.’

An honest, manly clasp of the hand, and then Robert Dalzell turned away. Where should he go? Where but back to the studio he had just left.

So then he had smoothed the way to some purpose. Ah! it had not been all pain that sturdy resolution of Jenny’s not to marry Charlie Devereux; he knew that now. And so he spent that long afternoon pondering over a new phase of the exceeding bitterness of success; while Rohan Blennerhasset was engaged in plunging Lord Ingram into still more complete confusion.

‘Marry my niece?’ he repeated, in a helpless, puzzled sort of way. ‘Why I thought, dear me, I thought—well never mind what I thought—you can’t have Beatrice all the same, she’s engaged to Charlie Devereux.’

‘To Charlie Devereux?’

‘To Charlie Devereux; and a fine fellow he is, though it’s a pity he was in such a hurry. But what am I saying? it’s my own doing. They’ve been engaged since childhood. I thought you—everybody—knew.’

‘Heartless to the end! Oh, what a perfect coquette!’

He bade Lord Ingram a hasty adieu, and gave orders to his servant to be ready for the five train.

Every moment in that house seemed to take a year from his life. 'Duped all through,' he murmured, as he paced to and fro under the beech trees. 'And to think, I should have let her see it, that she should have preached propriety to me that day.'

He never noticed Mr. Dalzell till he was close to him.

'Cool here, isn't it?' he said, as though a stroll under the beech trees needed some apology.

'Very!' said the painter in a dreamy, abstracted way. Instead of quitting the walk as he had intended he turned with the painter, pondering whether he could satisfy his curiosity without raising suspicion. He wanted to know whether it had really been no secret that Miss Ingram was engaged, so that he might see how far his own blindness had duped him. At last he decided.

'Dalzell,' he said abruptly, 'did you know—do you know whether Charlie Devereux is engaged?'

'He is.'

'Ah! Good-bye, Dalzell; I suppose I'll see you in town some time when these festivities are ended. By the bye, they're wearing you; you're confoundedly pale, man.'

'So are you,' was Robert Dalzell's involuntary exclamation, as he grasped the hand of the younger and sterner man. 'Where are you going so suddenly? I hope nothing has happened? No misunderstanding between yourself and Miss Kate?'

Dalzell spoke with all the freedom of a very old friend; spoke as no one else would have dared to speak to the cleverest lawyer in all Ireland.

'There is no misunderstanding, or anything else but friendship, between Kate Ingram and myself. I never loved her; she knows that, and is very well pleased to

know it. But I might have made a fool of myself for another. Ah, well, I have no right to reproach her. Give my best wishes to Devereux and to her.'

He was gone, and a moment after the painter from his leafy shelter saw the light dog-cart rattle down the chief avenue.

'Poor fellow, poor fellow, I never suspected this,' he murmured, as he resumed his measured walk. 'I'm not the only one, after all, who finds it a cross sort of life.'

He did not find as much consolation in the reflection as another would have. It did not lessen his loneliness that another tasted its bitterness.

So he walked up and down under the beech trees, heedless whether the sun set in a bed of pure gold or fiery red, until the dressing-bell warned him of the hour, warned him that the days were gone by when a shattered heart excused a like state of raiment, or wasted affections pleaded in favour of a morning coat at dinner.

How bright everything looked in the drawing-room. The company had thinned, but there still lingered some half-dozen elegantly got-up gentlemen, with immaculate coat tails and ties of the tiniest, and one or two young ladies, schoolfellows of Miss Ingram's in the early days when she had not been an heiress, as well as Miss Bouverie, who criticised Kate with her sleepy eyes that never seemed to see anything, but that took in at one languid glance as much as another would have learnt after half-an-hour's vulgar staring.

Not only everything but everybody looked bright. The elf was the centre of one group, Kate of another, both unusually animated, while Miss Ingram swept about in her queenly fashion, with a bon-mot or a smile for every

one, according to the capabilities of each recipient. Her sarcasm was toned down to-night to a merry overflow of fun; as she approached Robert Dalzell it merged, as it always did when she neared him, into pure kindness.

'Have you heard the good news? I have not seen you all day. You know they are engaged?'

'Yes.'

'Have you congratulated them yet? No? Well, don't forget. She values your friendship, Mr. Dalzell. Is your picture finished yet?' she added, abruptly changing the conversation in obedience to some secret instinct.

'Not quite—nearly. Will you look at it to-morrow?'

'Thank you—may I? I don't trouble you too much?'

'You never trouble me; it is very good of you to brighten an old man's study. How happy your cousin looks. I have never seen her look so—so nearly as handsome as you.'

'Mr. Dalzell, you ought to be put in Coventry for such an outrageous compliment. As it is your first—and it is to be hoped last—attempt, I let it pass.'

'It is true your cousin's profile is purely Grecian——'

'And mine is—ahem!'

'But I alluded to the expression.'

'Is that a covert form of telling me that intellect is my forte? Say at once that I'm that monstrosity, a blue, and I'll call on every gentleman in the room to defend an unprotected female from libel. But don't you think Kate has very good reason to look happy?'

'To be sure—they were such friends.'

'And then he is everything that could be desired. Where would you find a more gallant young fellow than this dashing soldier cousin of mine?'

'True, true.'

'Just look at Jenny, Mr. Dalzell. I always thought it a wonderful face, with those great black eyes and those coils of hair; but to-day she has developed into as handsome a little flirt as ever I saw. What a power of sympathy she must have.'

Miss Ingram passed on; and it was not till just before going down to dinner that Jenny received Mr. Dalzell's congratulations. She looked up in blank perplexity. An insane idea that simple, single-minded Robert Dalzell was degenerating into sarcasm took possession of her.

'I knew you loved him, Jenny; you should not have tried to deceive me,' he said, in conclusion.

'Your penetration is decidedly superior to mine,' she responded sharply.

'You would not marry a man you did not like?'

'I said so once in my life, and that was when Charlie wanted to make a fool of himself.'

'How? You are engaged, are you not?'

'To that dapper little fellow to go down to dinner. He has been told I'm a West Indian heiress—polite for negro, you know—and I've told him I'm not. But he likes the lie better than the truth—how many do!—so I shall do no more to disturb the delusion to-night, but in the meantime he shall pay for it. Besides, he can best be spared; he wouldn't be much use to take down anyone much taller than myself.'

'Oh, Jenny Joy! Charlie Devereux?'

'Surely I've done condoling with Mr. Devereux. I've turned him over, or rather he's turned himself over; to Kate.'

'Jenny, I cannot understand this.'

'Why, it's easy enough. Charlie loved my Kate all along, and she, like a dear sensible girl, appreciated him after she saw the difference between him and Mr. Blennerhasset, who never really cared about her at all, and only engaged her to be his wife as he would engage a cook, because he thought she would suit. And all the time we put her down for being so foolish not to marry Charlie.'

'And you?'

'What about me?'

'He proposed to you this morning?'

'Yes. I haven't told Kate yet; but I will, just to punish him for getting so downhearted in a hurry.'

The grave, quiet face of the painter grew unnaturally pale and stern.

'Things have changed since I was young,' he said. 'It was not usual then for a gentleman to propose in the morning to one, and be engaged to another in the evening.'

'You're not angry with Charlie Devereux?'

'Either he loved you, or he did not.'

'Of course he didn't love me. I never thought he did; he never thought so himself.'

'Then how dare he propose to you in trifling?'

'It was no trifling, it was very sad, sober earnest. Poor fellow, he would have married a black just then if she had said she would have him.'

'But you—you liked him?'

'Of course I did, and do, and always shall, better almost than anybody else. There are not so many Charlie Devereuxs in the world that I should pass him over. And

you don't know how happy I am that things have righted themselves at last.'

'I can't understand it,' he repeated, in a puzzled sort of way, as a noise of rustling dresses indicated a downward flight from the drawing-room, and Jenny's dapper little squire stepped forward.

'Upon my word, Jenny, you're getting a shocking little flirt,' whispered Miss Ingram as she passed.

'Poor little fellow,' said Jenny, in the same tone. 'Won't it be—excuse the slang—an awful sell when he finds out—if ever he lets himself, that is—that I'm not a negro?'

Apparently he did not find it out that night, for he was as attentive as such a dapper little person might be, and Jenny, in better spirits than she had ever been in her life before, reined in her sharp retorts, and listened with a devoutness that would have done credit to a more practised hand.

Poor Mr. Dalzell! He could not, as he had so emphatically stated, understand it, why Mr. Devereux should propose to one and be accepted by another in the afternoon. Why Lord Ingram should, after a pause, announce the engagement with imposing solemnity, and a strange suppressed excitement disturbing the aristocratic repose of his faultless features that yet looked so thin and drawn to-night. Why Jenny should laugh and talk with a glorious glitter of happiness in her big eyes.

What was it all? Like a vision came before him the pale, stern face of Rohan Blennerhasset. What had he to do with it? Did Jenny rejoice that he was free? Was that the secret of her gladness? And Rohan Blennerhasset? Clearly he had not known to whom Charlie was.

actually engaged, that was plain enough from the way he spoke of Kate. He had, then, doubtless fallen into the same mistake by some means, and had after all been alluding to Jenny, as Mr. Dalzell had at first concluded.

Oh, wise man! Rohan Blennerhasset could not have argued it out more logically than did this simple Robert Dalzell under the pressure of a great misery. But instead of eating his dinner like a sensible man, he spent his time in forming plans how to let the lawyer know of his mistake, and neglected his partner in a shameful manner. Quite forgetting that Jenny had not had the advantage of going through his lucid course of reasoning, he opened the subject rather abruptly during the evening.

‘How stupid of me, child, to keep urging you to marry Devereux, when it was Mr. Blennerhasset you preferred. I didn’t see it till we were at dinner.’

‘You must be very sharp to see it now,’ she retorted.

‘I might have seen it before, but somehow I got it into my head that you were engaged to the other, and of course it never struck me you liked Blennerhasset, or I wouldn’t have let the poor fellow go away as he did, without a word of comfort.’

‘Mr. Dalzell, are you quite sure you are well? Or perhaps it is I that am delirious, and fancy all these comical things.’

They had moved out on the terrace from listening ears, and she looked up in the moonlight with such a really puzzled expression that a doubt suddenly assailed the strong castle he had with his own hands built up for Giant Despair. Ah! how many of us do build up these castles, and refuse to believe that any good can come to us. How many of us woo the horrid monster, and writing

hard things against ourselves, point to them as the decrees of Providence. Closing our senses persistently to any bright hope of a better fortune, we call up the hopelessness of our lot as a witness against the injustice of the Creator. And we must not always expect that doubts will come strong enough to assail the prisons we have built for ourselves; we must not always look for a light powerful enough to pierce the chinks and crannies we have so industriously stopped, though good does come to men who can believe no good of themselves, as in the case of Robert Dalzell.

‘Perhaps you don’t love him, Jenny?’

‘Perhaps I don’t. I wish you’d tell me why you ask.’

‘Because he seems to love you, Jenny. That would make a difference, I suppose?’ and again his heart stood still. Only for a moment, then it went at racing speed, as the answer came prompt and decided.

‘Indeed, it wouldn’t. I’d not have the man if he was at my feet, and rolling in diamonds. You’re under a very funny mistake all the same; he hates me like poison. If he doesn’t, I do him.’

‘But he’s handsome, Jenny Joy,’ and his voice grew thick and hurried.

‘I don’t deny it, so is a wax doll.’

‘He is young.’

‘That I deny; he never was that. Perhaps when he marries he’ll grow young; it’s his only hope.’

‘He’s clever.’

‘With all his cleverness he couldn’t see what a fool might see.’

‘Jenny Joy, are you sure you’re not deceiving me, deceiving yourself? Are you sure that you might not one day love him?’

‘Oh, you’re too considerate, really. What an opinion you must have had of me. What! have I neither eyes nor ears, that I must think more of a man whose heart is a stone to everyone good and kind and noble.’

‘Oh, Jenny, would a kind heart outweigh youth and good looks and golden locks? Oh, Jenny Joy, I am old and plain and grey-haired, but I have a kind heart.’

CHAPTER XLII.

NOTHING TO REGRET. HOW ROHAN BLENNERHASSET AND MISS INGRAM PARTED.

THE amphibious inhabitants of Finch Street were beginning to grow accustomed to the sight of the aristocratic-looking gentleman who wandered day after day among the shipping, looking from one passer-by to another as though he would have spoken, then halting in a vague, purposeless sort of way, and again shambling on. After a time the shipping clerks got used to him, too, and nodded a sleepy reply to the anxious questions concerning Australian-bound ships, put in a furtive, hurried whisper. By-and-by the shipping clerks, and the amphibious ones too, ceased to remark anything strange in the shadow that began invariably to follow the questioner, although this shadow was of changing shape, being sometimes a stalwart white-headed man, who put no vague questions, but kept his eye in a decidedly practical way on his substance, at a convenient distance; sometimes a woman closely veiled, who observed the same precautions.

It wanted a month to the day appointed for Charlie’s

wedding, when Miss Ingram called him from the breakfast-room, and they strolled down under the beeches.

'Charlie, would you be very much surprised to hear that uncle Ralph had taken his passage for Australia?'

Charlie stopped short and stared at his cousin.

'I must explain quickly; I don't like to leave him too long alone. While you and Kate have been busy I have been watching.'

'Poor Flossy,' he interrupted very tenderly, 'I did think—well, I thought that only love for another could have saved that man from loving Kate.'

'You were wrong. But that is a dream past and gone, why do you try to recall it?' she said impatiently. 'Well, I have been uncle Ralph's companion in the house of late, and every time he slips out I slip out too, or send Vyse; he's the only one I care to let into the secret. It was his perusal of the shipping news that first attracted my attention. I found that he haunted Finch Street locality, and now he has taken his passage on board the "Maid of Armagh," under an assumed name.'

'What is his object?'

'That I can only guess at. I fancy—I can hardly tell why, except from a hundred little complaints and moans—that he wants to find Balfe's child.'

'The girl he sentenced to transportation fifteen years ago?'

'Yes.'

'What is to be done?'

'That is just what I want to arrange. My plan would be to suggest to him a voyage to Sydney, offering myself as companion. That would deprive him of any necessity for secrecy; and you know, Charlie, we could not prevent him going, he is sane enough on other points.'

‘But there might be some easier way of gaining information than a voyage to the Antipodes. I’ll make inquiries.’

‘But that is an after consideration. Charlie, don’t you think I had better enter into his plans, and find out if this is really his object?’

‘Yes, Flossy; but if it must be a voyage, I will be his companion, not you.’

‘You will do no such thing. You will hasten your marriage, and while you are going on your tour we will set out on ours. Don’t you see it is the very thing for Kate, this voyage. Her father’s drooping spirits weigh heavily on her’s; and then, who knows? a voyage may restore him.’

‘Kate and I will both go. You shall not sacrifice yourself.’

‘A pretty nurse you would be for a sick man, and Kate has had quite enough of it for a while. As to sacrificing myself, I don’t see what I shall leave behind to regret, except friends who will forget me so soon that no matter when I return they will be sure of the pleasure of recalling old recollections.’

Scarcely more than a week later Rohan Blennerhasset was stepping from a Holyhead packet on to the Kingstown pier. Several of his town acquaintances were lounging there, and he would have passed them with a curt good day. But they had news for a man who had been a fortnight out of the kingdom, and he did not get away so easily.

‘Have you heard the news?’ one asked. ‘I suppose not; we didn’t hear it till half an hour ago. Devereux was married to Miss Ingram this morning.’

'This morning!' he repeated, half stunned. 'How long have I been away?'

'It's a regular cheat now, isn't it? to get over the grand wedding that was to astonish the natives in this underhand fashion. But it seems Lord Ingram is very shaky and ill, and they are afraid, I suppose, he might put them in mourning.'

'Ah! Good day.'

'But, Blennerhasset——'

'Sorry I can't stay, but I'm very busy just now.'

He walked along rapidly, like a man in a dream, rejecting the insinuating offers of cab and car men. He had almost reached Dublin when a close carriage dashed up close to him, and was stopped suddenly with a jerk that nearly sent the horses on their haunches. He was already a little past, and had caught sight of a lady in a travelling dress; but he could not do less than turn and approach the carriage window. A pale face was put out; a tiny gloved hand was extended. He scarcely touched the hand, but he looked at the face with a cold impassibility that gave his handsome features a forbidding sternness.

'We leave Ireland to-day, Mr. Blennerhasset. I thought you would say good-bye. You do not seem surprised.'

'I heard it before.'

'Charlie told you, perhaps?'

'No, I heard it just now at Kingstown,' he rejoined very coldly.

He had heard, and it was nothing to him, would not have moved him to bid her farewell, had she not stopped the carriage.

'I must not detain you. Good-bye, Mr. Blennerhasset.'

He bowed stiffly to the finished coquette, who, while

trying what effect the tidings of her marriage would produce, wore such a sad, wistful look, that only changed into haughty coldness as he lifted his hat with ceremonious politeness. The pale, proud face was bent with an icy indifference equal to his own, then disappeared from the window ; the carriage rolled on, and Blennerhasset proceeded on his way, haunted by that last look, and cursing the art by which she could call it up.

And she—she the finished coquette, leaned back on the cushions, blessing the accident that had permitted her to leave Dublin alone, that no eye might see her sorrow.

‘Why should this voyage be dreadful to me?’ she murmured, with exceeding bitterness. ‘Was I not right when I said I have nothing to leave behind me that I need regret?’

CHAPTER XLIII.

REST FOR THE WEARY.

OUT under the burning rays of an Australian sun, no shelter visible, nothing but a dry, treeless waste below, an intolerably bright sky overhead. In a rude waggon, adapted for country travelling, sat three persons—an elderly man, and a young girl, and a female servant. In front, with the driver, was another man, but with no signs of feebleness, though his head was white.

‘You are hot, dear uncle Ralph.’

‘Yes,’ he moaned, shifting uneasily, ‘and so tired, my dear.’

Miss Ingram leaned forward and whispered something to Vyse.

'You're not going to stop again,' said Lord Ingram irritably. 'I won't have it.'

'Not just yet, uncle, and then only for a moment to get cool.'

He muttered peevishly to himself, while Vyse whispered to his mistress that the driver did not know of any stopping-place for hours, except a farm across the hill.

'Tell him to drive there, then, and pass no remark,' she said quietly.

In about an hour the vehicle drew up in a large farm-yard, and the agile Vyse was down to hand out his young lady and his master, too, who after standing alone for a moment leant on his niece for support. They approached the farm-house together, but the woman who stood in the half-closed doorway, did not offer any greeting, till the sweet musical tones of Miss Ingram's voice fell on her ear.

'Will you allow us to rest here a little? The hot sun of these treeless plains has quite exhausted me.'

She was a gaunt, hollow-eyed woman, with regular features and pale lips. She looked from the vigorous young girl to the feeble man, and comprehended the pious deceit. Yet there was no savour of bushranger's hospitality as she moved aside to let them pass.

'Come in,' she said, still watching them keenly.

It was a large, lofty apartment, with an earthen floor and a double roof; the middle one being of loose rafters permitted a view of the extreme height of the upper one, which was conical. A vault-like coolness pervaded the place, together with a grave-like smell of damp earth, and almost on the threshold Lord Ingram was seized with a violent fit of shivering.

'Bring the old gentleman here,' said the woman, opening a door, and leading the way into a smaller room, raised a foot, and with a boarded floor. A single bed, a basin stand, a small rude table, and a chair, composed the furniture. The atmosphere was warmer here, and Miss Ingram sat down beside her uncle on a stool brought by the woman.

'How very hot it is outside,' she said, turning to the woman in the gracious, winning way natural to her. 'You must forgive us for intruding on you; we are not used to this climate.'

'Only just come, maybe?'

'Well, it's some months now; but near the towns it didn't seem so bad.. Aren't you very lonely here?'

'I like it,' was the curt reply. 'You're English, perhaps?'

'No, Irish.'

'Irish, is it? And you come here from the old country?'

'Yes. Is Ireland your home, too?'

The woman passed her hand wearily across her forehead, as though she would have wiped out the eagerness she felt was showing.

'Poor old Ireland;,' and the hard voice took for the first time a trace of womanly softness. 'Oh, it's weary. I am to see it; weary, weary, day and night. How is the country looking, ma'am? Fair and green, I know; and I am not there to see it. It's not often we have visitors here,' she added hastily, 'and may be so best, for they mightn't be pleasant ones; but I'll go and hurry the tea, the gentleman looks tired.'

'I'm not tired, thank you;,' and the nobleman's manner

was a peevish, irritable, childish edition of his former aristocratic indifference. 'The Ingrams are not easily tired. Beatrice, you are wasting time; you have not made any inquiries yet.'

'Ingram?' interrupted the woman, her natural paleness deepening to a corpse-like pallor. 'Is your name Ingram? What brings you here — here under my roof——'

She checked herself suddenly as she noticed his blank stare, and went out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

'Beatrice,' he said, relapsing into his feeble phant, 'you don't make inquiries—you don't hurry; and yet, I have no time to spare.'

She looked up at the thin pinched face as she removed her hat, and a sudden chill ran through her frame as the conviction suddenly seized her that he had indeed no time to lose. A sick faintness compelled her to kneel beside his chair as she looked fearfully up at the pale, cadaverous countenance, over which a mighty change had passed, a change that deepened as she looked.

'Oh, Uncle Ralph, what is it?'

She was standing now, with her arms around that poor old man; her weakness gone, her strength come in its fulness, to meet this sudden need.

'Nothing, my dear—only—I have no time to spare,' he whispered, as the deadly faintness passed for the time.

Away in that far-off land, buried in its very wilds, she did not lose heart, but summoned her servant, and unlocked her bag of cordials, as calmly as though the old man's caprice had not brought her miles away from any settle-

ment where she could obtain assistance. When he was somewhat revived she induced him to lie down, and after having covered him comfortably up, and established Vyse at the bedside, she proceeded to obey his urgent entreaties, and to make inquiries.

Oh, how sick she was of these inquiries, how utterly weary, as she came out into the vault-like room, with its odour of damp earth. Her heart almost failed her, as she thought of her uncle, sick, perhaps dying, in that out-of-the-way spot.

‘May I speak to you one moment?’ she said, detaining the hostess as she was passing through. ‘I want to ask you a few questions.’

The woman looked suspiciously at her with those hollow eyes.

‘What is it? Don’t come and try to ferret things out here. You’d better not.’

‘I don’t want to know anything that you may not choose to tell me,’ said Miss Ingram in her quiet, fearless way. ‘I am only afraid you will not be able to answer my questions. Still I must put them, to satisfy my poor uncle. He is very ill.’

‘Is he? Does he suffer too? It’s time.’

‘Did you know Lord Ingram?’

‘Maybe I did. You’re not ferreting out now.’

‘I must tell you my uncle has suffered a great deal. Years ago he lost his daughter.’

‘Lost his daughter, did he? Ay, and so did other people, and couldn’t make much fuss about it!’

‘It preyed upon his mind greatly,’ the lady continued, with a quiet gravity that began to enforce attention; ‘more than anyone ever imagined. And then he had

other troubles. Altogether he has had a very miserable life for the last fifteen years.'

'Fifteen years? So have I.'

'And now he has taken an idea into his head that nothing can remove. He wants to find a girl of the name of Alice Balfe, who came out here fifteen years ago.'

There was a dead pause for some seconds, and during the interval the heavy breathing of Lord Ingram could be distinctly heard. No other sound was audible. If there was cooking, if there were servants, there was no sign of either. All was ghostly and still. Even the strip of sunlight that pierced in at the end of the blind had nothing of life in its taper brightness. Motionless as the rude furniture were the two figures, the lady seated on the bench near the deal table, her tall, hollow-eyed hostess standing opposite.

'I suppose you cannot help me,' said Miss Ingram at length. 'I scarcely expected you could.'

She made no answer, that pale-lipped woman; she only turned away, and opening an end door, permitted a glimpse of a kitchen. Soon she returned with a cloth, and proceeded to place on the table such utensils as the place afforded; but all with a strange noiselessness. Some very good bread, fresh butter, eggs, and tea, formed the repast she offered to travellers.

The afternoon went by without giving Lord Ingram strength to rise, without taking the cadaverous hue from his face.

'Is there any doctor hereabouts?' asked Miss Ingram.

'No.'

'Where then?'

'Fifty miles is the nearest.'

‘And that is——’

‘A day’s journey with good horses. You could do it in six hours, if you didn’t mind knocking up your beasts, but you couldn’t come back soon.’

Miss Ingram returned to Vyse, but a glance at her uncle checked the command on her lips. She looked at the faithful servant, but his head was bowed in despair, and she rushed back to the other room. Her white face and dilated eyes startled the woman.

‘Come in and tell me whether it’s any use sending.’

The woman followed almost involuntarily, and stood with the young girl beside the bed. Yes, the change had deepened; the pinched nose, the blue lips, the white forehead, with the death-damp on it, the hair that fell in a heavy lifeless lock over it, all told of a mighty presence.

‘I wouldn’t send, Miss, if I were you,’ said the woman in a low, hushed tone. It was a simple sentence, but it spoke volumes to that lonely girl. Without a word she knelt down beside that thin, wretched pallet, and took in hers the weak, worn hand. Hush! he speaks.

‘If I could only find her. I have no time to lose. If I could only see her once. I can’t meet her there,’ he said, ‘it was all my fault that she was lost.’

‘What right had he to say that anyone was lost while a merciful God is over all?’ said Miss Ingram, in low tones that sounded to herself unnaturally calm.

There was a short silence, and again he spoke.

‘Couldn’t you find her for me, my dear? Oh, I haven’t much time to spare, and I should like to hear her forgive me.’

The piteous entreaty almost broke her heart.

‘Oh, uncle Ralph, I would if I could. I would give the-

best years of my life to find her for you now. But I cannot. Will you not throw yourself on that merciful Redeemer? Will you not trust Him to seek her out?'

'I can't—I can't die easy.'

'Oh, my dear, my dear, God can find out that poor girl, and console her without you. Only believe that, and it will comfort you.'

'I can't—I can't.'

He moaned restlessly, and his eyes wandered imploringly. Stepping to the other side of the bed, that gaunt woman bent over him, her face as deathly as his own.

'What would you wish her to say to you if you could find her, Lord Ingram?'

The wandering eyes fixed themselves on her face; the flickering senses burnt feebly, but clearly.

'That she forgives me; that she is not beyond a repentance; that I have not her soul to answer for.'

'She does forgive you.'

He sat straight up in the bed with a sudden effort, though the bead-like drops rolled down his face.

'Who are you?'

'I am Alice Balfe.'

'Whom I sent across the seas for a very little theft, merely because one more or less of the herd was nothing to me?'

'Yes. But I say I forgive you.'

'And you are not a thief?'

'No.'

'Not an outcast?'

'No.'

'And you hope to go to Heaven when you die?'

'I do,' was the solemn reply.

Whiter grew the face; heavier grew the weight against Miss Ingram; then his head fell back on his niece's shoulder.

Not dead yet; only fainted. They laid him carefully, lovingly down, and applied such restoratives as were at hand. All night long they watched beside him. Once Miss Ingram begged her hostess to leave her and go to her husband, who had returned from his work.

'He's had his supper, Miss, and if you don't mind I'll stay with you. There's meat, and bread, and plenty of milk on the table, if you'll send your servant out to it.'

But poor old Vyse could not, would not be sent away; and so they three watched together. Towards morning somewhat of the pinched look passed away, and Alice, stealing quietly away, returned with some strong tea, and put Miss Ingram in a chair by the window. The beverage revived the weary girl, and for a moment she looked out at the pale pink sky. When she turned, Alice was leaning over the bed. She had grasped in hers the poor wandering hand, and she held up the other to keep away Miss Ingram. Her gesture was unheeded, and Beatrice Ingram stood beside her uncle. She uttered no cry to disturb the parting spirit; she only whispered a wordless prayer as the breath came in faint, fluttering gasps. It ceased, and the cold morning light streamed in on the face of the dead.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HOUR BEFORE DAY.

'You see, ma'am, I got away, never mind how, after three years of it. I didn't have much thought of good, or indeed of anything. What sort of a life I might have led I don't know, but I met Martin Coyne. He had emigrated on account of the trouble at home, that wouldn't let him pay a rent three times as much as it ought to have been, and he took me for a girl come out to service. It was, before Heaven, the only deception I ever practised on him; but how could I expect an honest boy like that to marry an escaped convict? And what would have become of me if he hadn't married me? I daren't look for a situation; and yet that crime has hung over me every hour since I've been his wife. I've been a good wife to him; I've saved and struggled for the day he'll have enough to bring us back to the old country; I've churned, and milked, and done my house-work with hardly a bit of help. I've slaved as few women could, but I've done it all in a perpetual fear. Every stranger that kem to the farm might be a policeman; and, ma'am, I could never look in his face again if he knew what I was.'

'Couldn't you trust him?' Miss Ingram said kindly and soothingly. 'Not let him find it out, but tell him?'

'I couldn't,' and she clasped her hands nervously. 'He's a poor man, but an honest one, always that, and the disgrace would kill him. I've been a good wife to him. I've saved pound upon pound for him, but the day he knew I blackened an honest name he'd curse me or die.'

‘You know best,’ Miss Ingram said kindly. ‘I hope you feel you have nothing to dread from Vyse and myself, and I thank you most sincerely for the kindness that prompted you in the face of so great a fear to comfort the last hours of my poor uncle.’

She stretched out her hand as she spoke, her white, ungloved hand. A sudden awkwardness came over that hard, gaunt woman. She looked curiously at the hand outstretched, half gave her own, withdrew it, and finally allowed it to be grasped, like one in a dream. Two big tears dropped on the check apron.

‘I will give your messages faithfully to your father, Mrs. Coyne, and I want you to keep this to remember me, and how grateful I shall always feel to you.’

It was a very handsome glittering purse, and it was not till after the cart had rolled away far out of sight of that strangely quiet farm-house, and of that little mound under the Norfolk pine, that Mrs. Coyne discovered the gift was as costly as elegant, being filled with bank notes.

Some days after a lady sat at one of the windows of the Palace Hotel, Sydney. Not even the bright sunset brought a colour to her pale cheek, or a touch of warmth to her lustreless black dress. Very delicate and slight she looked as she sat there, a stranger in a strange land, pondering the sad question as to which were better, that or the only other alternative open to her, to be a stranger in her own country. True she had friends there, but not one who would miss her, not one to whom her presence was necessary. Which would it be better, to begin the struggle for a life that had just now no charm here where she was, if uncared for, also unknown, or to go back an alien where she had once received a royal homage? She

knew neither Charlie nor Mrs. Chirrup would ever let her want a home; but would not a life, that had at least the charm of being fought for, suit her better than a purely vegetable existence?

She thought the question over in a dreamy, abstracted way, for her energies were too much exhausted to permit any vigorous mental exertion. Life was so dreary, so colourless, besides, it scarcely seemed worth the trouble of thinking, and she only thought because she could not help it, because her brain would go on, try as she might to rest, working out a ceaseless round of problems that nearly drove her distracted.

‘A genelman, miss, wants awful bad to see you.’

He was a colonial-bred waiter, and didn’t often say ‘miss,’ but there was something in the aspect of that pale, slight girl in her deep mourning robe that awed him, something in the fair aristocratic face that lowered his voice from its habitual twang.

‘It’s a mistake,’ she said indifferently, ‘and I don’t care to see strangers.’


‘Beg pardon, genelman said as how it’s wery per-tickler.’

‘Show him in, then.’

She did not move from her indolent attitude till the door had opened. Then she rose with chilly courtesy, and stood face to face with Rohan Blennerhasset.

He checked himself in the middle of the room, and stood looking at her, at the dreamy face that took no tinge of colour from the sudden surprise, that seemed so startlingly white above that heavy, lustreless, clinging black.

‘They told me you were alone, but can it really be that are?’ was the startled question.



'No, I have Vyse and Waters with me,' she said, in a quiet, abstracted way. Then a thought struck her. Could it be that he was ignorant of what had happened? and yet must be so, he had not time to have heard except through the hotel people, and they were almost ignorant of her affairs. And yet it seemed so long, so long since she had left that lonely little mound, so long since she had written a mournful letter to an orphan.

'Perhaps you don't know —'

For the first time her voice faltered. A sick, giddy feeling, as of involuntary motion, an idea of chairs waltzing round in confusing circles, of a dim chaos.

'Poor child! poor child!'

The protecting touch, the pitying tone broke down the self-command she had sustained throughout. Somehow, with the consciousness scarcely acknowledged of some one to lean on, ebbd away all her strength, now that she was no longer alone the sense of her loneliness overwhelmed her, and for a few moments she indulged in that true woman's luxury, a good cry. It did her good, but, woman-like, she was ungrateful for the relief, and checked herself with the angry reflection of how ridiculous her want of self-control must appear; and before this man of all others, whom she had vowed in her heart of hearts she would compel to respect her. She allowed him to lead her to a sofa, and utter exhaustion completing what her will might have failed in, she shaded her eyes with one hand, and waited quietly for him to question her.

'Forgive me if I distress you,' he said very gently, 'but I was so ignorant—so utterly unprepared.'

The kindness of the tone almost unnerved her, but she remembered how, in spite of this apparent consideration,

he must in reality despise her childish weakness. He was a sensible man, you know, and above such folly.

‘Of course you hadn’t time to hear—but I forgot.’

Then in a few low, disjointed sentences she told of her uncle’s last illness.

‘I have come too late to be of much use,’ he said as she concluded her very brief story, ‘but at least, I can save you any trouble about arranging for your return. You will command me—will you not—if I can be of any other service?’

She took her hand from her forehead, and leant back, looking straight before her. Her eyes were fixed on the gorgeous parrots and monstrous apples of the wall paper, but their glaring hideousness did not disturb her, for she did not see them.

‘I don’t think I shall go back.’

‘Not go back?’ he repeated, in blank dismay, looking down at the pale face in which the set lines were beginning to come, the little white hands folded with something of determination against the black dress. ‘You mean you want a good rest first, and I don’t wonder. I will wait as long as you like.’

‘Thank you, but I don’t mean that,’ and her eyes never changed from their fixed look, her voice from its dull mechanical tone. ‘I think I shall stay here altogether—at least for the present.’

‘Stay here? You cannot mean that.’

‘Why not? I left nothing in Ireland to regret—nobody to miss me. Why should I go back?’

‘Nothing to regret? nobody to miss you?’

‘Not one to miss me,’ she repeated, in tones ringing

with an unconscious pathos ; ' not one who would be much the poorer if I were blotted out of the living creation.'

' You speak hardly.'

' Oh, no. Charlie and Kate love me dearly, but they have each other. Godmother is the only one who might drop a tear on my grave for herself as well as for me, and she has two children to console her for my absence, ' Charlie and Charlie's wife.'

' And I ? What am I to do ?'

Her eyes never moved from the flaring parrots, but her voice took a colder, harder tone, as she went on after a short pause.

' So you see I have no urgent reason to go back to Ireland, and many to stay here. I shall be able to struggle more vigorously for a prize worth having, and above all,' and the set lines deepened, and the spiteful little hands clasped each other more firmly, ' above all, I shall be able to avoid the pity of my friends. That is one of the insults of fortune I could not suffer.'

' You are very proud, Miss Ingram.'

She did not answer. A clear perception came to her that she had thrown away with a reckless hand her last chance, but she knew that if it were to do over again she would do it. It might be that Rohan Blennerhasset was not a man to ignore a rejection, but neither was she the woman to yield to the sensationalism of a proposal made at a moment when her desolate situation had appealed to an extra romantic chivalry.

' Will you care to hear why I left Ireland for Australia ? Will it bore you too much ?'

' I shall be interested to hear,' she said, in her most

conventional tones, yet with an utter weariness that the profession of interest could not veil.

‘You remember, perhaps, how we parted?’

The lassitude gave way to a sudden hauteur, and she drew herself up. For the first time a bright angry crimson overspread face and neck.

‘You remember? Well, I want you to remember, too, that it was not till the vessel had been gone a week that I knew I had said good-bye to Beatrice Ingram, not Mrs. Devereux. The next vessel for this part was the “Ocean Queen,” bound for Sydney, as it happened. She had bad weather round the Cape, and only arrived this morning. That is my story.’

She made no comment, any more than if it had been long and prosy enough to put her to sleep.

The silence was again broken by the voice of her companion; not quite so clear, perhaps, but brave and manly still.

‘And now, must you stay? or must I stay? or must we both go home together?’

Very dark, with a thick darkness that might be felt, had been that hour before day, but the dawn was all the brighter.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW THE DISCOVERY CAME.

NOISELESS as ever was that far-away farm-house, with its strip of sunlight peeping under the blind. There was no servant about the place, no one but Mrs. Martin Coyne,

and she moved from dairy to kitchen, from kitchen to poultry-yard, with a restless, ceaseless activity, as though she had been some figure of leather or wood, concealing the secret of perpetual motion, rather than human flesh and blood.

A clatter through the farmyard brings the blood to her face, then dashes it back, leaving her ghastly. A loud knocking reverberates like thunder in that silent place, and wakes the poultry near at hand into something like a commotion, strangely at variance with their usual suppressed chatter. Has discovery come at last? Have all these years of watching, and waiting, and working, been for nothing?

Only a letter marked across with the words, 'In haste.' No postman ever came to Red Clay farm. It was, therefore, a private messenger, and after a pause she pointed to a shed where his horse would be protected from the sun, and then beckoned him into the lofty, chilly, earthy apartment. Taciturn as ever, she offered no word of greeting to the stranger, but silently placing bread and meat and ale on the table, disappeared with the letter.

It was nearly dark when Martin Coyne came home. He was a silent man, almost as silent as his wife, but he offered a 'good evening' to the stranger as he passed through into the kitchen, outside which were congregated the men and women who had come home with the farmer, waiting for the summons to supper. One or two of the latter had entered to help their mistress, and were busy putting provisions on the large deal table that stretched from end to end. At the head of the table stood Martin Coyne's wife, as she had often stood before, but there was something in her appearance that struck him as

strange. Perhaps it was the unusual pallor of a face always pale, perhaps it was the increased sternness of the compressed mouth, or it might have been the fact that, though it was Monday night, she wore her Sunday gown and hat, as though she were going a journey. Before he had time to ask what was up, she turned to the women.

‘Clear out, girls, and shut the door. I’ll call when I want you.’

“Why, wife, what’s up?”

She looked round slowly at the roomy kitchen; the large, roughly-hewn dresser, with no lack of homely ware; the long table, with its goodly rows of mugs and plates, its plentiful supply of corn bread, and smoking beef hams, and oatmeal porridge; at the handsome eight-day clock in the corner; the picture of the Mother and Child over the settle; at the fire that blazed in the wide fireplace with a cheery vigour that was not a little comforting in the cold Australian night. Something in the gesture struck Martin Coyne painfully, it was so like a farewell look, and he drew nearer to his wife.

‘I got a letter to-day, Martin!’

‘Ay?’

Again she looked round. She had not much to look at, you will say. Nothing that you would consider attractive. But she and her husband had begun life twelve years before with just thirty shillings, and that clean kitchen, with its plain plenty, was now the centre of a goodly farm. Every brick in the walls had been put in under the personal superintendence of husband or wife. Every article of furniture had been constructed by themselves. Every cup, and bowl, and flagon, had a small history of rigid saving and increased prosperity attached to it.

'It's twelve years since I've been your wife, Martin Coyne. Have you any fault to find with me?'

'Fault? What fault should I have, my girl?'

'I made up my mind when I married you, Martin Coyne, that I would be a good wife to you; that I'd toil, and scrape, and save for you as no other woman could or would. Have I done it, or have I not?'

'You have; every bit of it.'

'Did you ever know me do anything all that time that you'd be ashamed for your wife to do?'

'No, never. Who said you did?'

'I asked for little help to keep your house and dairy. I was content to get up early and lie down late, and milk, and scrub, and churn, that the women you got me might help on the farm, to save you the cost of more labour. Is that true?'

'True as gospel.'

'I never spent a farthing I could help; I never grudged the pain of trouble or denial that'd make the lump bigger, that'd bring you a bit nearer to the old country. Isn't it so?'

'Sure it is so. Well, haven't we the good of it, and isn't it all yours as much as mine?'

'No. I didn't toil night and day, as no slave but a wife would have the heart to do, for myself. I done it for you, Martin Coyne. You had thirty shillings after you feed the priest, and now you have thirty head of cattle. You have a good team of oxen, and as many acres as you can can sow; you have a house big enough and comfortable enough, and plenty to put in it. Well, I'm going to leave it all to-night,—and it's for you, Martin Coyne, to say whether I'll ever come back!'

‘Going away!’ and the farmer’s sunburnt visage grew a sickly colour. ‘What for?’

‘I never deceived you but once, Martin Coyne; only once, as Heaven is my witness!’

‘Deceived me?’ he gasped. ‘No, no; don’t say that. Don’t tell me if you did. I tell you, it’s better not.’

‘It’s hear it you must,’ she said, still staring before her in the same stony way. ‘It can’t be hid any more. You didn’t marry an emigrant—you married an escaped convict!’

He never spoke, and she did not dare—that hard, stern woman—she did not dare look at him.

‘I knew the Coynes were decent people, and held their heads high; and I knew you were the proudest and the poorest of a stock proud and poor. I couldn’t tell you. I couldn’t give you up. For to look for work, or to try to get away by myself from Sydney, would just be asking to get back to gaol. But I made a vow that it was the only wrong I’d ever do you.’

Still he did not speak; and she went on.

‘I thought I’d keep my secret to the grave, but it wasn’t to be. I got a letter to-day from the lady that was here. My father is dying at the station, and he craves for a sight of me. I thought I gave him up for you; but when I see him as I see him all this blessed day, crying out that he can’t die easy, I feel I must go. I can’t leave him there. No, though his name is Balfe the robber. I couldn’t let him die by himself; he’s my father!’

Her voice faltered a little, a very little as she added,

‘I’ll take Jim Blake with me; he’s a kind-hearted boy, and won’t mind turning out in the night, and will bring back the cart and horses. Don’t curse me, Martin Coyne..

Nobody in Sydney need know that Balfe's daughter was ever your wife.'

'No, nor anywhere else unless you tell them,' and the upright figure of the farmer passed with surprising rapidity round the table to where his wife stood. 'Jim Blake, indeed! You don't suppose you're going all the way to Sydney without me?'

'Martin?'

For the first time tears softened the hollow eyes. Five minutes before she had looked forty-five; now a weight of hardness seemed lifted and she looked young, younger than she had looked twelve years before, when she was just eighteen. Hand in hand they stood as they had never stood before in all their married life, and big drops trickled down on the bush farmer's big brown hand, till he began to fear that he, too, should grow foolish.

'Come, old woman, get the supper over, and we'll be off in just no time at all.'

'But the farm, Martin?'

'The farm? If Jim Blake was good enough to take care of my wife, he's good enough to look after the farm till we're back.'

Raving at times, and talking sensibly at others, Balfe seemed always to retain a sense of the presence of the girl who four years ago had awed him into something like respect.

'Yes, you were clever, though not the way they thought. They all suspected you of plotting not to do just what you were doing, him as well as the rest.'

'My wife has forgiven all that,' Blennerhasset said.

'Ay, is that it?' and a smile of grim humour dis-

torted the gaunt features. 'That's how you were so hard to please with the cousin. And you tell me he died away from her, died with my girl's hand where his own should have been?' he added abruptly.

'With your daughter's hand in his,' Miss Ingram whispered.

'Here, in Australia?'

'Yes, in your daughter's house.'

'Has she a house? Oh, if she would only come. I haven't seen her for fifteen years,' and the fevered eye lit up with a passionate longing. 'Oh, if she would only come, if I could just see her face for one minute, I could die.' A sudden idea brought the big drops to his forehead, and he made a frantic struggle to rise.

'Oh, I know I won't see her.'

'If you knock about like that you certainly will not,' said Blennerhasset firmly.

'I won't see her. Don't you see—he, my enemy, died away from his child, and so must I. But it's not just—I say it's not just. He had more happiness than me.'

'Poor fellow. Is that your idea of God's justice? Must you go down to the grave with that terrible doctrine of an eye for an eye? Can you not believe in an illimitable mercy that freely forgives all things—a mercy that, however it may discipline, never punishes?'

'No,' he articulated, 'I can't.'

'And yet you are spared to repent?'

'If I only could.'

'Father!'

A gaunt, haggard woman was leaning over him, tears were dropping on his parched hands. Was this his daughter, his little girl, his small Aileen?

Bit by bit her features grew upon him, and a startling change came over his face.

‘Are you—are you happy?’

‘Only for this, poor father, so happy.’

‘You’re married, they tell me.’

‘Twelve years to-day, father.’

‘And your husband—is he honest?’

‘Honest—everything that is good.’

‘Kind to you, my girl?’

‘Too kind, father.’

He lay silent for a while, holding her hand as she knelt beside him. When he spoke again it was to utter a question that in some shape or other had perplexed him all his life.

‘Who did it all?’

He could see no way for human agency to deliver his daughter from the infamy of a convict station.

‘Who done it? Who taught you to be honest?’

‘Father, I think God sent me my husband to save me.’

The sound of that dread name on his daughter’s lips roused the man. With a sudden fevered effort he rose to a sitting posture, heedless of the pain of his shattered limbs.

‘You hope to go to Heaven?’

It was the question Lord Ingram had asked with the same agonised earnestness.

‘Yes, I do, father.’

‘I have been denying mercy all my life. I see it now. No, don’t lay me down yet.’

By-and-by he spoke again.

‘He hadn’t his daughter’s hand round him, had he?’


‘No, father.’

So they sat, father and daughter so long parted, only to meet on the shores of the river of Death.

The end did not come till two days after. Then the tramp and his daughter parted once more. Would they meet again? Who shall say? We only know that God's power, goodness, and pity form a mystic Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal.

THE END.

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